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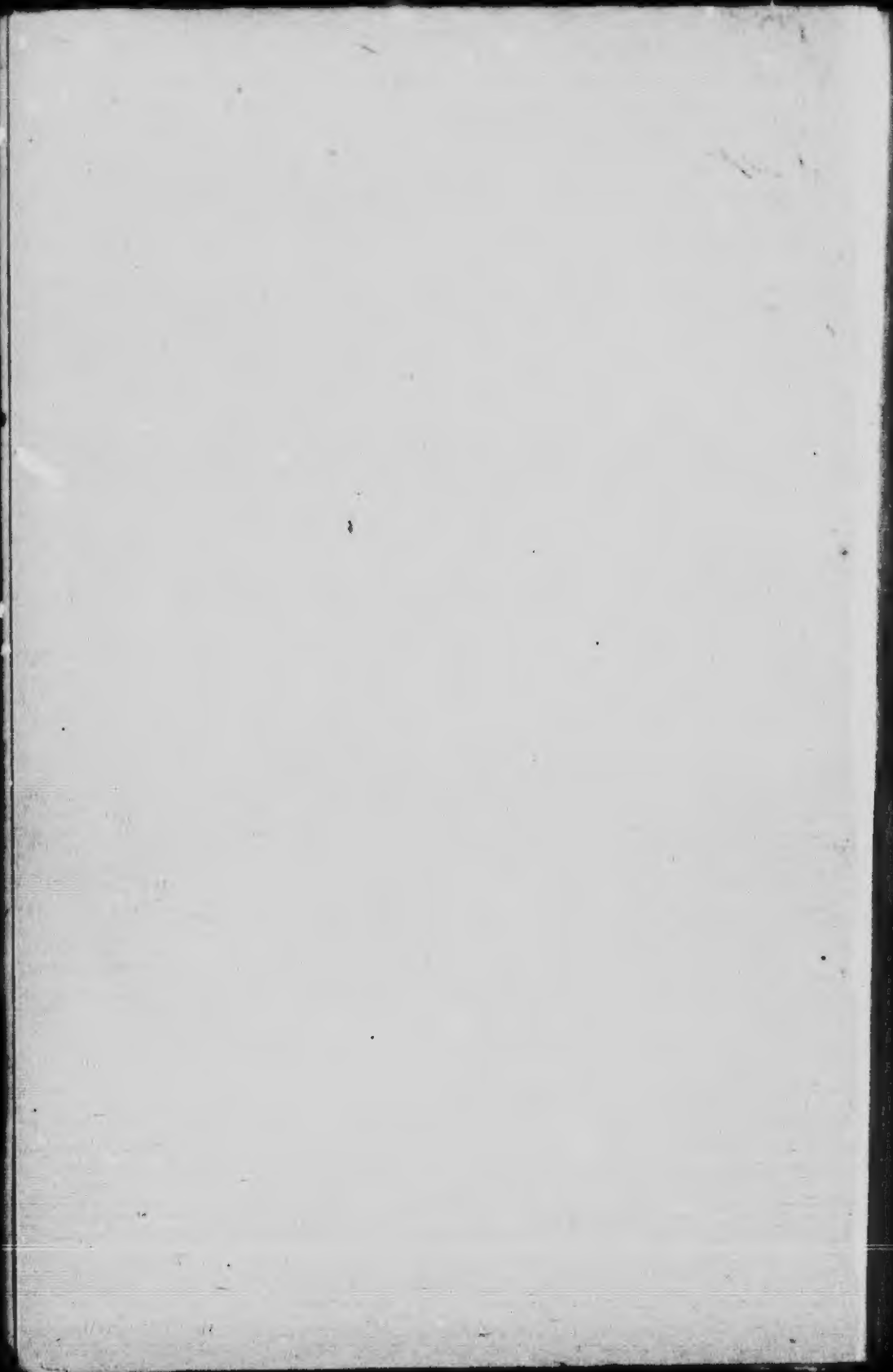
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1919



THE THUNDERBOLT



THE THUNDERBOLT

BY
G. COLMORE

AUTHOR OF
"CONCERNING OLIVER KNOX," "THE GUEST," "A LADDER OF TEARS
ETC. ETC.

TORONTO
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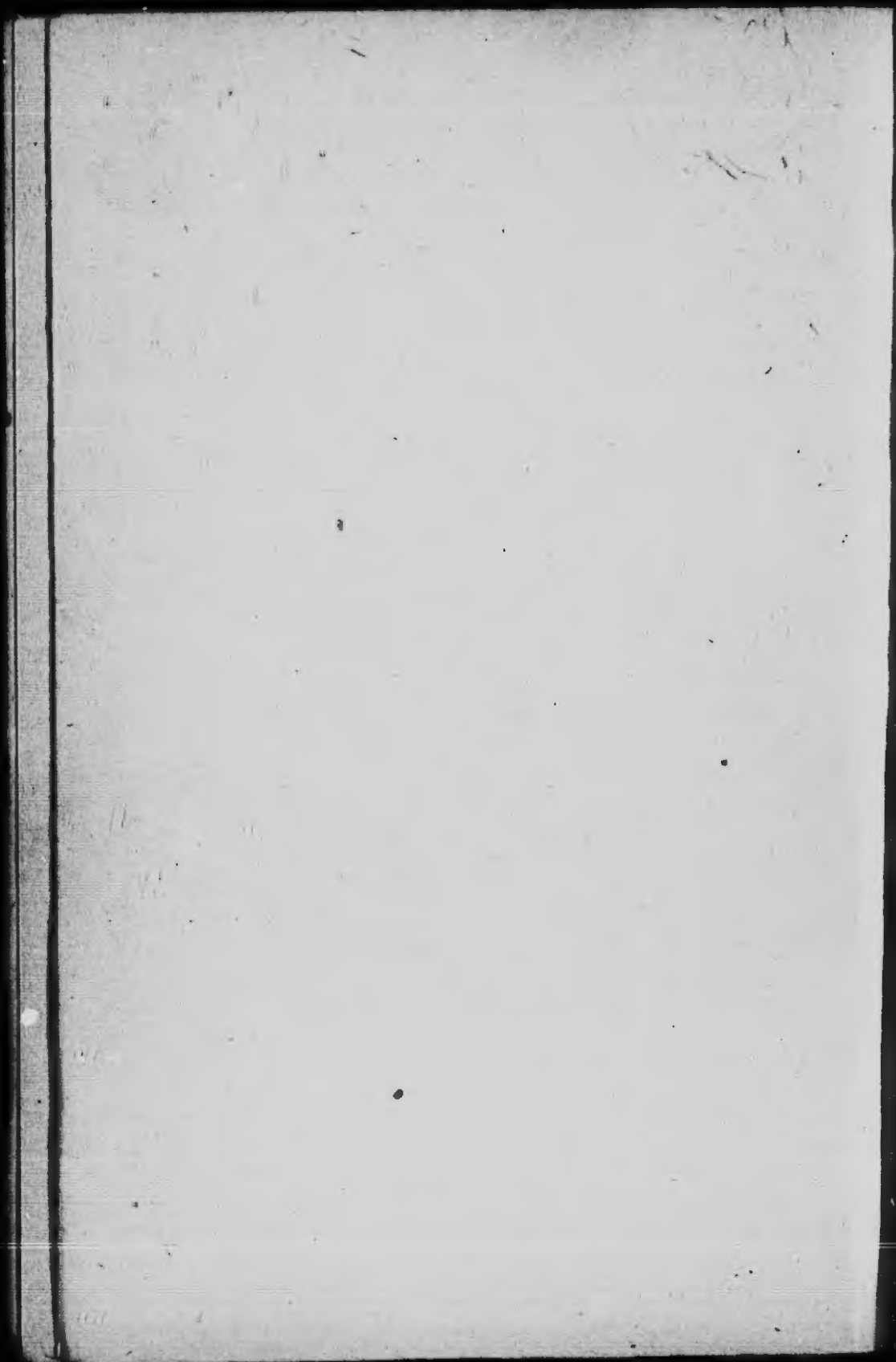
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TO

A. W. L.

WITH WHOM I HAVE OFTEN DISCUSSED
THE PLACE OF FACT IN FICTION, I
DEDICATE A PIECE OF FICTION WHICH
OWES BOTH ITS CONCEPTION AND ITS
CLIMAX TO FACT



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BOOK I

NURSE

CHAPTER I

GEORGINA BONHAM was devoted to her little girl ; so everybody said, and said, too, that the devotion was not surprising.

For Dorrie—Doris was her name—was a most attractive child ; fair-haired, blue-eyed, soft-cheeked, kissable, and with no objection to being kissed. Moreover she was the sole legacy left to Georgina by her dead husband and his very image, said everybody again—the limited everybody who had known him. He too had been fair-haired, blue-eyed and smooth of skin ; rumour had it that he also had been receptive in regard to kisses, and not only receptive but prone to initiative.

Mrs. Bonham herself was somewhat sallow, dark of eye and with smooth dark abundant hair. Her features were rounded and calm, and so was her bosom. She conveyed an impression of amplitude and stability. In the town in which she lived, a moderate-sized market town, she was one of the pillars in society's highest storey. Her name was on all committees ; her hand, at every tea-meeting, held a teapot or manipulated an urn ; her figure was never absent from the corner seat of her pew in the parish church, save on

the score of indisposition. And this was rare, since except for an occasional headache she had good health.

Mrs. Bonham lived in a nice house on the outskirts of the town, and at the back of the house was a fair-sized garden, nicely kept. Everything about her was nice; the house linen, her clothes, the white-tiled bathroom, the trim casement curtains. People liked to go to tea with Mrs. Bonham, because, they said, she had such nice teas, and they liked talking to her because she had such nice ideas. Both her teas and her ideas were pleasant in the sense that they were never disturbing—save only in so far as disturbance may arise from plethora; and as Georgina's friends were rarely indiscreet in appetite and not too avid of conversation, surfeit in regard to her admirable fare was next door to unknown and in regard to her optimism non-existent.

For Mrs. Bonham was an optimist; assuming that God was in His heaven, she assumed also that all was right with the world. In this, as in everything else, experience—her own experience—was her guide. God, in church, was represented by the vicar, a sound and fluent preacher; outside the church by the mayor, the police and the doctor; and none of these, in the discharge of their several offices, had she ever found occasion to criticize.

She had many friends, for she was kind, and also circumspectly generous; she gave sometimes handsome and never trashy presents, helped deserving cases, and subscribed to well-established charities. Friends she had and acquaintances; also distant admirers whom she spoke to at meetings and philanthropic gatherings, but who were not sufficiently high in the social scale to be admitted to her set; and

besides these, one particular friend, who was also her philosopher and guide.

This was a retired physician, a native of the town, who had practised in London, but has returned to Stottleham to live at ease on the proceeds of his own savings and his father's small fortune. He was a man interested in botany and the collecting of prints; considerably older than Mrs. Bonham, and representative to her of what was essential in humanity and civilization. His beard, close cut, was perfectly trimmed, his linen was spotless, his hands and nails were scrupulously clean. His clothes were as well cut as his beard; his house was well appointed; he lived in comfort, but without ostensible luxury. To be sure he never went to church except on Christmas Day and at Easter, but then he was a man; so it did not matter: had he had a wife, he would, Georgina felt assured, have insisted upon her regular attendance. His manner pleased her; in it was that mixture of deference to her sex and sense of superiority in his own which connoted the, to her, typically correct male attitude. It goes without saying that he had no obvious vices.

Besides these indispensable qualifications, positive and negative, he possessed a wisdom which always perceived not only on which side Georgina's bread was buttered—her own common sense was sufficient guide for that—but on which portions of loaves, as yet uncut, butter would probably be spread. It was as to the uncut loaves that she invariably consulted him.

He consulted *her* when he wanted fresh chintz for his drawing-room, or new linoleum for the hall. Georgina knew by instinct when a colour was "fast": he also knew the kind of pattern suitable for the

house of a bachelor who occasionally asked ladies to tea.

In 1898 Mrs. Bonham was thirty-three, Carter Rayke was forty-eight, and Doris was six.

CHAPTER II

DORIS being six, it seemed to Georgina that she was getting, if not beyond the nursery, yet certainly beyond Nurse. Not in the sense that Nurse could not manage her, for Nurse had managed her—without any appearance of management—with obvious ease ever since she was six weeks old. But Nurse did not speak grammatically, she had an accent not free from Cockney twang, and she mismanaged her aitches with the same thoroughness with which she managed Dorrie. When Mrs. Bonham decided that Dorrie was getting beyond Nurse, what she meant was that Nurse's manners and deportment were not of a kind upon which the imitative Dorrie could be permitted to model herself.

There were, however, two obstacles against taking Dorrie out of the hands of Nurse: one was Nurse's devotion to Dorrie; the other was Dorrie's devotion to Nurse. The latter was the more difficult to deal with. It would of course be painful to send Nurse away, inasmuch as the parting would be painful to Nurse. But nurses must expect to part from their nurslings; partings were included in their calling; a woman of any pretensions to common sense would be prepared for dismissal any day after the child she had brought up had reached the age of five; and Dorrie was six. Nurse therefore, though grieved, as

was natural and indeed proper, would accept the situation.

The real difficulty was in regard to Dorrie. Her mother had every reason to fear that not only would she not accept the situation, but that she would kick against it. Not in a literal sense and not with violence, for Dorrie was extraordinarily un-disagreeable, but in the disconcerting fashion of making herself ill. Every time that Nurse had a holiday, Dorrie refused to go to sleep until Nurse had returned, had tucked the clothes round her—with no difference in the tucking from the tucking performed by Georgina herself—and had kissed her good-night. And once—a dreadful once, when Nurse had perforce gone home for a week to tend a sick mother—Dorrie had fretted till she was sick. It was absurd, of course, all of it, the lying awake, the falling asleep the instant Nurse had proved her presence, the fretting and the pining; absurd and annoying. But there it was.

The question was, in face of the facts, how to make the necessary change; and the more Mrs. Bonham thought about it the more necessary it seemed to be; the very exaggeration of Dorrie's devotion emphasized the necessity. Georgina turned over the situation in her own mind, and having decided that it must be dealt with, took, in regard to methods of dealing, her usual course; that is to say she wrote to Dr. Rayke and asked him to come to tea.

"DEAR DOCTOR,

"I am in a difficulty and should be so glad of your kind advice. Can you find time to take tea with me to-morrow afternoon? Any time after four o'clock would suit me. Please send word by bearer, and if

THE THUNDERBOLT

to-morrow is not convenient, kindly fix some other day. On hearing from you, I will arrange accordingly.

"Always yours sincerely,

"GEORGINA BONHAM."

The note was dispatched at twelve o'clock on Tuesday, and by half-past twelve bearer, who was, indeed, the unconscious Nurse, had brought back a reply.

"DEAR MRS. BONHAM,

"I am, as always, at your service. I shall be delighted to wait upon you to-morrow afternoon at 4.15, and add to your feminine intuition such practical counsel as I am capable of.

"Yours very sincerely,

"CARTER RAYKE."

Mrs. Bonham read the note with satisfaction, and began to "arrange accordingly." There was, as a matter of fact, only one arrangement she could make on that same day, and she made it forthwith. She went into the kitchen and ordered the cook to make, as early in the afternoon as possible, a currant and sultana cake. It was the kind of cake the Doctor liked best, and he liked his cake to be a day old, or, as Georgina phrased it, made the day before.

On this, the day before, there was nothing further to be done, and after lunch, having rested for half an hour and changed her dress, she set out for the Needlework Guild Meeting with a comparatively quiet mind.

CHAPTER III

THE Needlework Guild was conducted under the combined dictatorship of Georgina Bonham and of Mrs. Vearing, the Vicar's wife. Its object was to provide underclothes for the poor of a London East End parish, and the minimum of its activities was to finish a hundred articles as the result of weekly meetings between the October of one year and Easter of the next. Members who failed in attendance were required to supply completed articles, varying in number according to the number of attendances missed, and in kind according to the tables to which severally they belonged.

For the work was systematically divided. There was a petticoat table, a nightgown table, a chemise table, and a table for what the wearers of the articles called drawers, and the ladies who made them knickerbockers. In command of each of these tables was a lady, distinguished not only by the fact that her seat was at the head of it, but by a badge worn over the left breast; and in supreme authority, supervising the tables, cutting out, folding up, scrutinizing the work and passing or rejecting it, were Mrs. Vearing and Mrs. Bonham. They sat—or more often stood—at a table apart, and while their judgment was sometimes inwardly or whisperingly questioned, it was never openly defied. Custom and social standing alike supported them; they were foremost amongst the leaders, perhaps *the* leaders of Stottleham society, and it was better to have a chemise turned back than to be left out of a social function.

Georgina to-day was a little late. She had paused

at the greengrocer and fruiterer's to buy a bunch of violets for Mrs. Vearing. There were usually cut flowers mingled with the fruit and vegetables, in this, the principal shop of its kind, and glancing at the window as she passed, Georgina saw violets as well as cabbages and oranges. She had had no intention of presenting Mrs. Vearing with flowers when she set out from home; but after a period of uncertainty and perturbation, she was feeling relieved by the prospect of to-morrow's conference, and the relief found expression in buying a bunch of violets and giving them to Mrs. Vearing.

"What a delicious smell of spring!" said Mrs. Vearing, as Georgina entered the Parish Room. "Oh, it's violets. How sweet!"

Georgina, with a smile, said: "They're for you. I know you like them. They caught my eye as I came past Merriman's."

"How lovely of you! I adore them. But it's just like you, dear Mrs. Bonham."

Through the room went a murmuring echo to the effect that it was just like Mrs. Bonham to buy violets and give them to somebody who adored them. Only Miss Truefitt sniffed: her sniff meant "Who *wouldn't* buy violets if threepence meant no more to them than it does to Mrs. Bonham?"

Mrs. Bonham, however, heard only the murmur and not the sniff. She took off her coat and rejoined Mrs. Vearing, feeling as if she had done something rather nice, and trying to look as if she thought she hadn't.

Mrs. Vearing presented her with an enormous pair of scissors.

"They're running short at the chemise table," she said, "and I've kept the fresh roll of calico for you."

You cut them so much better than I do." In a lower voice she added: "When they've all got talking again, there's something I want to speak to you about."

"I'm sure I don't." Georgina spoke more loudly than was her wont. Then she too dropped her voice, murmuring: "All right."

The two conspirators proceeded to discuss chemises and their measurements, Mrs. Vearing helping to undo the fresh roll of unbleached calico, and Georgina busy with the scissors: then, when presently the tongues at the tables were busy, they again became low-voiced and confidential.

"Well, what is it?" Georgina asked.

Mrs. Vearing gave a cautious glance at the nearest table; it was the knickerbocker table.

"You know Mrs. Robinson is leaving Stottleham, I suppose?"

Georgina nodded, partly from caution, partly because she had a pin in her mouth.

Mrs. Vearing gave a glance round the tables. Scraps of conversation emerged from the blurred hum of the voices.

"—a gold band round the two that stick out, and I was to take her back in three months." "*—quite* good enough—ninepence three-farthings and washes like a rag." "*—I* couldn't put up with it any longer and told her so, and she said . . ." "*—jellies* beautifully. I had the receipt from a friend in Yorkshire."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Vearing, "who to put in her place."

It was Georgina's turn to glance round the tables: her glance was one not so much of caution as of scrutiny: it paused momentarily here and there in its survey.

"There are one or two, aren't there?" she asked.
"Mrs. Dicks and Miss——"

"That's just it; I don't know which to choose. If I take one, the other'll be offended."

Mrs. Bonham paused in her cutting. "Let me see! Mrs. Robinson's on the committee, isn't she, as well as head of the knickerbockers?"

"Yes."

"Well, couldn't we put Mrs. Dicks on the committee and make Miss Debenham head? No one can expect—at least it's absurd if they do——"

"It would be all right as far as it goes, but there's Mrs. Markham. I *know* she thought she ought to have been put at the head of the nightgowns instead of Miss Pottlebury."

"I shouldn't have thought—Mrs. Markham always seems so pleasant——"

"Oh, but I know. It came round to me—through Mrs. Ansell. She complained to Mrs. Pitt, and Mrs. Pitt told Mrs. Ansell, and Mrs. Ansell told me—in confidence of course."

"What a worry they are!"

"She said she didn't know what Miss Pottlebury had done more than *she'd* done," Mrs. Vearing went on in a rush of whispers. "She didn't know why she, a married woman, should be lorded over by Miss Pottlebury. You know the way they talk."

"Miss Pottlebury is rather domineering," observed Georgina judiciously.

"Well, we can't change her; that would make more bother than ever. Once head they've got to stay head. And so few——" Mrs. Vearing sighed. "—so few resign."

Mrs. Bonham continued to cut for about half a

minute in reflective silence ; then she stopped short and put down the scissors.

"Why not change the system altogether?" she said. "Why not appoint them just for one session, and give them all a turn?—all that *could* be heads, I mean of course."

The boldness of the suggested reform struck Mrs. Vearing dumb. When she spoke it was in gasps.

"But," she said, "it's never—been like that—all these years."

"I don't see any other way," Mrs. Bonham said, "of not giving offence—at least not to so many."

"I believe you're right," Mrs. Vearing said, "I believe you are. Dear Mrs. Bonham, you always have such good ideas."

In her excitement her voice had risen ; the last sentence was in a high key and a loud tone ; and all over the room inquiring heads were turned, wondering what was Mrs. Bonham's latest idea. Did it outdo the violets?

Curiosity, however, remained unsatisfied.

"We will discuss it some other time," Mrs. Vearing said with a sudden drop of her voice to a whisper.

She left her seat to make a tour of inspection. Mrs. Bonham took measurements for another chemise.

CHAPTER IV

Mrs. BONHAM and Mrs. Vearing walked a little bit of the way home together, to the point at which Bear Street, in which was the Parish Room, joined the High Street. Mrs. Vearing had said : "Do come back

to tea with me and let us talk the tables out!" but Mrs. Bonham was obdurate; she had promised Dorrie to be home by half-past four, and she never disappointed Dorrie.

"Another day," Georgina said, "Thursday or Friday if you like. To-morrow I am engaged."

Mrs. Vearing, disappointed but subdued, for she felt that against Mrs. Bonham's decision there was no appeal, grasped at Thursday, and turned down the High Street, somewhat consoled, to unbosom herself to the Vicar and to put her violets in water. They were already beginning to flag.

Mrs. Bonham, taking her way up the street, was calmly content in the consciousness of a satisfactory afternoon. She had been kind to Mrs. Vearing and pleasant to the many members of the Guild who had clustered round her after the meeting and offered to help her on with her coat: she had given good advice and had shown herself to be top dog in general capability. Mrs. Bonham did not make use of the term top dog, nor did she analyse the various small tributaries which composed the stream of her content; but a general sense of top-doggishness inspired her mood and gave a briskness to her mental demeanour.

She walked slowly, for the High Street sloped upwards, and the spring air, sweet and soft, was a little exhausting. Moreover she had plenty of time. Half-past four she had said to Dorrie, and it was not much past the quarter. Otherwise she would have hurried in spite of the spring languor: she would have reached home panting rather than disappoint Dorrie.

Dorrie came first with her, before everything and everybody. Her strongest desire was to be first with Dorrie. She thought she *was* first—she was sure of it.

Nevertheless there was a little secret unadmitted doubt which, inadmissible, was also better untested, a little tiny shadow of a doubt lest Dorrie, should Georgina be a few minutes late, might not be so dreadfully disappointed after all. Not that she questioned Dorrie's devotion to her, or the warmth of Dorrie's welcome; but Dorrie was always happy when Nurse was there, and Nurse of course was there—Nurse was always there. It was a distinctly agreeable thought that Dr. Rayke was coming on the morrow to arrange the paving of the way for Nurse's abdication.

Arrived at home Dorrie, in answer to Georgina's call, came rushing to greet her. Dorrie's cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkled.

"Had a nice afternoon, darling?"

"Lightful."

"What have you been doing?"

"Playing with Nurse."

"You're getting rather big now to play with Nurse."

They went hand in hand to the drawing-room, where there was a mingled smell of hyacinths and polished floor. It was "turning out" day for the drawing-room, and everything was at high-water mark of cleanliness and order.

"Rather too big. Don't you think so?" said Mrs. Bonham.

"I'm not 'normous," Dorrie said with a little pucker of the brows.

"Not enormous, no, I know." Mrs. Bonham smiled. "But too big to play with Nurse. It's only babies who play with nurses. You don't want to stay a baby, do you, Dorrie?"

Dorrie did not answer the question: she changed the subject.

"Cook gave me currants," she said.

The kitchen was out of bounds according to Mrs. Bonham's code, but diplomacy demanded compromises. So all she said was: "How kind of Cook!"

"She was making a cake for Uncle Rayke."

"How ever did she—why should she suppose it was for Uncle Rayke?"

"Is it?" asked Dorrie.

"Yes, but——"

Mrs. Bonham stopped, partly because it was impossible to explain to Dorrie why, though the cake actually was for the entertainment of Dr. Rayke, it was outrageous of Cook to have taken the fact for granted, and partly because Janet, the parlourmaid, came in with the tea-tray.

"Cook's real name is Gladys," said Dorrie. "I know because she said so. Did you know, Mummy?"

"I'm not sure—I don't remember."

As a matter of fact Georgina did not know. When she had applied for Cook's character, she had presented her compliments to Cook's former employer and stated that she would be obliged by information as to whether G. Jawkins was honest, sober, etc., and she had never got the length of inquiring whether G. stood for Gladys, Gertrude or Grace. But at the moment her thoughts were unconcerned with Cook's name and intent upon her subtlety. It had not occurred to Mrs. Bonham that a currant and sultana cake made "the day before" was inevitably associated in the mind of the kitchen with the advent of Dr. Rayke on the day after. Accustomed herself to put two and two together, she was disposed to regard it as

impertinence on the part of Cook to make the same simple calculation, and especially to bring out the result as four: if Cook *did* presume to tackle numerical problems, she should at least have the grace to abstain from correct solutions. Of course there was no reason why every inmate of the kitchen should not know that Dr. Rayke was coming to tea; it was a quite ordinary and fairly frequent occurrence; nevertheless it somehow annoyed Mrs. Bonham that what was by her unstated should, in her household, be taken for granted.

"I think Gladys is a pretty name," Dorrie went on. "Don't you, Mummy?"

"Yes, very," said Georgina absently.

"It's almost prettier than Cook is. But Cook's rather pretty—the top part of her. She sings too—nice long songs."

Janet had left the room and Mrs. Bonham poured herself out a cup of tea, considering in her mind how to escape from the Scylla of Nurse without foundering on the Charybdis of Cook. Dorrie, unanswerd, proceeded to criticize Charybdis.

"Only she's too fat. She comes out like you, Mummy, but she doesn't go in again. It looks nicer to go in again, don't you think so, Mummy?"

Georgina answered at last. "Darling," she said, "I think you've talked enough about Cook."

Dorrie accepted the suggestion: she at once abandoned Cook.

"Me and Nurse——" she began, but Georgina interrupted her.

"I'll give you a piece of cake if you sit down quietly and don't make crumbs on the carpet, and then I'll read to you."

Mrs. Bonham did not approve of eating between meals and Dorrie had already had her tea ; moreover Mrs. Bonham had a letter to write which she had intended to dispatch by the evening post. But what was she to do ? What could anybody do ? The child was incorrigible. Would Dr. Rayke be able to do anything ? Georgina clung to to-morrow. It was safe to cling ; he never failed her, had never failed yet, in the keeping of an appointment. All the same it was absurd of Cook . . . really life was very trying, and it was difficult to steer one's way. . . .

"The story I like best," said Dorrie, "is 'The Mermaid.' So does Nurse."

CHAPTER V

TO-MORROW came ; and also Dr. Rayke.

He came, almost to the minute, at four-fifteen, and his punctuality was a blessing inasmuch as it spared Mrs. Bonham the fussiness of waiting and of listening for the bell. Not that his presence or the expectation of his presence excited her ; it was a presence she had never found other than tranquillizing ; it was not the man, but the subject she was to discuss with the man, which gave her the fidgets—or would have given her the fidgets, had he been more than two minutes after the appointed hour.

Would he understand after all ? This was the half-formulated doubt that disturbed her. A man's judgment was sounder than a woman's, his counsel—generally speaking—more reliable. Still, there were things that men somehow didn't seem to get the ins

and out of: Georgina was not sure that her present perplexity was not one of them. And if he didn't understand—of his own accord, spontaneously, it might be difficult to make him see the point. If—

Oh, there was the bell and here he was!

He came in with the kind smile she was accustomed to and the kindest look in his eyes. He brought her a small bunch of orchids. He grew orchids for the purpose of studying them.

How kind of him! said Mrs. Bonham. Would Janet bring a vase, please—the opal glass one. Orchids were such wonderful things. And how about the window? Should they leave it open or would he feel the draught? His throat—she knew it was delicate.

"Oh, leave it open, please," said Rayke. "My throat's as right as rain, and it's a real spring day—what one imagines at least as spring. For we very seldom get it, do we?"

"Very seldom," said Georgina, "very seldom indeed."

She told herself that it was absurd to be nervous, but was nervous nevertheless. Supposing he didn't understand? thought her difficulty trivial, and Georgina trivial for troubling over it? supposing he didn't see, with his man's vision, that there was a difficulty? She fiddled with the orchids, arranging them this way and that. She did not quite know how to begin.

"How's Dorrie?" asked Rayke.

She could not take the lead he gave her, for Janet, in a minute or two now, would be coming in with the tea; and to begin and then be interrupted . . . no, she must wait.

So she said Dorrie was all right, and then—once more—what wonderful things orchids were.

Mrs. Vearing, could she have seen her now, would have marvelled. This was not the dear Mrs. Bonham she knew, of calm and assured demeanour, not the Mrs. Bonham admired of Stottleham. Nor was this, for the matter of that, Dr. Rayke's Mrs. Bonham, nor indeed Georgina's own Mrs. Bonham: it was, so to speak, a spurious Mrs. Bonham, the product of a concatenation of circumstances, unexampled hitherto, and, presumably, never to occur again. And in all the concatenation, the one item which made Georgina nervous was the doubt, arising just before his ring at the bell, as to whether Dr. Rayke would—could understand.

How absurd of her to doubt! how foolish! how—when you came to think of it—how unworthy! For of course he understood. It really had been positively disloyal of her, a lack of understanding on her own part, ever to have questioned the capacity of his comprehension. This was the substance of the mood, of the tide of reaction which followed close upon the period of nervous doubt.

For over his first cup of tea, at the scone stage, before ever the cake was even cut, Dr. Rayke mastered the situation, with all its complexities and its resulting problem. Munching cake—and the cake was excellent, one of Cook's triumphs—he expressed his sympathy, recapitulated the position, and emphasized the salient points. Finally, smoking a cigarette by the open window (Georgina did not like smoke in the drawing-room, but the situation was unusual and important, and the window was open; she begged the Doctor to smoke and not to retire to

the dining-room to do it), smoking by the open window, looking out on the green spring lawn, on the crocuses in the neat beds dying off and the daffodils coming on, Dr. Rayke propounded his solution of the difficulty.

It was at this point that Georgina's mood changed once again, that the tide of her relief and confidence received a check. She was not nervous any more, but the elation provided by her friend's comprehending friendliness was damped: frankly, she did not like his solution. At first sight, at first hearing, all that was contumacious in her kicked against his solution. She was half inclined to break in upon his calm elaboration of the solution with "Oh, if that's all you've got to suggest, you may as well let it alone. I could do as well as *that* without you."

But she did not break in; her conception of Dr. Rayke's conception of her stood between her annoyance and its manifestation, supported by her conception of herself, a conception strongly imbued with the dear Mrs. Bonham of Mrs. Vearing. So, having in contemplation a wholesale measure of reform, she listened, downcast but discreet, to a scheme of compromise. For Dr. Rayke's solution was a compromise. In the event she perceived and acknowledged that he was justified, but in the suggestion she found him tiresome, inefficient, disappointing.

This was at the first blush, and—a little—at the second; but as he rounded up his plan and elaborated its tactics, as he crossed his t's with caution, and carefully dotted his i's, Mrs. Bonham too became gradually rounded up: gradually the vexation was subtracted from her disappointment and the disappointment itself merged in reluctant appreciation.

For the Doctor's scheme, if not ideally drastic, was at any rate practically compassable; if completeness was lacking, success was probable. It excluded the idea of casting out the bondwoman and giving sole dominion to the freewoman; the risk of sending Nurse right out into the wilderness was too great in view of the attitude of Nurse's charge. But Nurse was no longer to be Nurse: if she might not be Hagar, she might and could and should and must be Hannah. Hannah was her Christian name, and Hannah henceforward she was to be; her sphere no longer the nursery, but the range of the house, the kitchen premises excepted. She was, in a word, to be housemaid and not nurse, unchanged as regarded space, but changed enormously in function.

Mrs. Bonham, as Rayke elaborated the salient points of the scheme, first admitted and then applauded its diplomacy. There was no occasion for fretting on the part of Dorrie, for Nurse—in person—would still be there; and when Dorrie had grown accustomed to the nursery-governess who, if not all at once yet bit by bit was to take over Nurse's duties of washing, dressing and the like, in addition to her own special duty of teaching, then Nurse, now to supersede the housemaid of the present, would, in her turn, be superseded by a housemaid of the future. And in addition to all this Mrs. Bonham would be spared the thankless and uncomfortable task of bundling—or appearing to bundle—Nurse out of the house.

Before Dr. Rayke went away she had regained all her respect for the masculine mind.

"You have indeed helped me," she said as he bade her goodbye; and on the doorstep: "How can I thank you?"

"By not thanking me at all. A word or two of advice! What's that? Why, nothing at all."

"On the contrary, it's very much—everything," murmured Mrs. Bonham.

"Besides, you know it's a pleasure to serve you."

He went down the approach, to the gate, turned there, took off his hat and waved to her.

What a friend he was! what a kind and helpful friend! Georgina, relieved in her mind, and elated in her mood, went back into the house to reflect on the opening of the campaign.

CHAPTER VI

DR. RAYKE returned home, if not exactly elated, yet well content. He had told Mrs. Bonham that it was a pleasure to him to serve her, and he had spoken the truth. He did not mind giving advice; he rather liked it; and advice was what she usually asked of him. Moreover, in addition to the satisfaction of giving it, he had the satisfaction of knowing it would be taken. She was a sensible woman, a woman who, if she had not—like most of her sex—the capacity for constructive reasoning, had at any rate the capacity for following sequential argument when the sequence was pointed out to her.

He was used to speak of Mrs. Bonham as a capable woman, and was not unwilling to be recognized as her guide, philosopher and friend. There were those in Stottleham who said he would not have been unwilling to add to these parts, so successfully played, the part of husband. But they were wrong.

There had indeed been a time, three years ago now, about fifteen months after he had come to settle down in Stottleham, when he had climbed up on to the fence enclosing the estate of matrimony and considered the attractions of that estate. There had been a period when he had wobbled, when, indeed, the angle of his predilection had inclined towards the enclosure; but finally he had pulled himself upright and descended on the single side.

The past spoke to him and he listened to its voice. For he had a past; not lurid or guilty or disgraceful, but flat with the flatness of the commonplace. When Mrs. Rayke died, he had said to himself: "Never again;" and the utterance was not a vow of constancy but of caution, inspired not by sentiment but satiety. Mrs. Rayke had been insufferably dull: it was her only fault, but a fault which had saturated married life with cheerlessness. And yet before marriage Rayke had thought her charming; pretty to look at—which she was; docile, which she also was; interesting, which she was not. Her intelligence had been swamped by her docility, and the Doctor, to whom the clinging and the docile aspects of womanhood were ideally the most desirable, had in practice been hoist with his own petard. For Mrs. Rayke had clung persistently, and with persistence had been docile; so docile that a master mind had no means of manifestation, and there was never an occasion on which it was possible to prove by argument superiority of judgment or opinion. She was, in fact, in respect of feminine virtues not only all his fancy had painted her, but immensely more. It was the remembrance of this immensity which had helped to bring him down on the solitary side of the fence.

Georgina Bonham appeared to be an eminently sensible woman; but then so had Marian Rayke before the name of Rayke had followed that of Marian. It was pleasant to go to tea with Mrs. Bonham and very pleasant to persuade her to his own way of thinking. It was pleasant to entertain Mrs. Bonham at tea at his own house, with one or two other friends to satisfy convention. But how would it be to have Mrs. Bonham, not coming occasionally to tea, not mingled with other company, but always there, undiluted, ready, waiting, for tea? and needing, perhaps, no persuasion of argument to bring her to his way of thinking, but uniformly ready to agree with anything and everything he might say? To experiment, with experience behind him, would be rash. Rayke, in short, was too much afraid of his own dominance to risk the result of its daily influence.

He need not have been afraid. Georgina was a woman whom marriage made less, not more amenable. Daily companionship with the Doctor would daily have diminished his domination so far as she was concerned: a certain distance was essential to any enchantment in her view. Dorrie's father, now that he was dead, was by her revered; while he was alive, he had annoyed her by continually getting into debt and expecting her to get him out. She was wont to speak, in all good faith, of her loss as a blighting sorrow, whereas the independence of widowhood had braced her; and to say, believing it, that her life with dear Theodore had been one of unbroken harmony, forgetting the many rifts within the lute which had not only made the music of marriage frequently mute, but sometimes discordant.

But, unconscious of any discrepancy between facts

and the glass-case atmosphere in which remembrance stored them, she yet, in vague unacknowledged fashion, was conscious of her own tendencies. With the halo of living in a separate house about him, Rayke's presence was stimulating, his opinion impressive, his advice illuminating. But in the same house? every day? *always* advising?

Georgina, too, had had her period of consideration. It had slightly preceded Rayke's, for she, sooner than he, had perceived whither he was tending: before he climbed up on to the fence, she had seen him looking through the palings. And she, as he, had considered the pros and cons of an amalgamated household. And she, in fact, it was who had settled the question. For there had been a moment in which, by the gentlest movement, an imperceptible tug, Georgina could have precipitated Rayke on to the matrimony side of the fence. She had seen the moment coming and was mistress of its emotions: Rayke, on the other hand, blundered into it and was at the moment's and Georgina's mercy.

He never knew that she had tacitly refused him, he never knew that, had she decided to accept him, he would have provided the opportunity for acceptance. Mrs. Bonham knew, and the knowledge flattered her self-esteem; knew too that, the crisis past, it would not recur; and the certainty fortified her confidence in the stability and comfort of their relations. She was not used to considering sex problems, was not interested in them, and did not think out the sequence of past phases or the course of the future. She only felt that everything was satisfactory and that she could rely upon Rayke for friendship, sympathy and advice, together with a suggestion of gallantry in his

attitude, not displeasing. And this was a state of affairs which she found entirely comfortable.

CHAPTER VII

RAYKE, contented in his independence, never dreamed that he owed it to Mrs. Bonham; nor dreamed, unconscious as he was of her decision, that the root cause of the decision was Dorrie.

Possibly Mrs. Bonham did not dream of it herself, since she was not given to defining the motives of her actions or seeking for the origins of her ideas; she was not the least interested in plumbing her own depths. There were, perhaps, no very great depths to plumb; but, profound or shallow, her devotion to Dorrie went down to the nethermost part of her, and was the unrecognized but determining agent in the main course of her plans and conduct.

Georgina had not said to herself in so many words that she remained a widow in order that there should be nobody to interfere between her and Dorrie, but such was the fact. She was willing, anxious, sometimes almost eager for Dr. Rayke's advice, and had invariably been disposed to follow it; but the advice of a friend, offered with the courtesy and deference with which Rayke's demeanour was infused, was a very different thing from the advice which, in the mouth of a husband, might take on a tone of authority. In her heart, instinctively, she knew that if Rayke made suggestions which to her seemed adverse to Dorrie's advantage, she would throw him and his suggestions

to the wind ; a comparatively easy matter in their present position, but bristling with controversies and inconveniences, were Rayke not only an inmate of her house, but legally its master. In her heart was the determination that Dorrie's interests should come before all else : in her heart was the conviction that the only certain way to safeguard them was to share her authority with none. Consciously she had not admitted all this into her consideration of the offer which Rayke would have made her had she deemed it expedient that the offer should be made ; but all this was present nevertheless in her emotional, if not in her mental view and formed the deciding factor. It loomed enormously larger than the sentimental element which gave colour and interest to her friendship with Rayke.

That element, never impulsively disturbing, had become in the last three years ever more comfortably calm : the liquid warmth of sentiment had jellied into a firm mould of friendship. Rayke's presence did not make Georgina's heart beat faster than did the presence of Mrs. Vearing, though it beat more pleasantly. She did not forget nor want to forget nor want Rayke to forget that he was a man and she a woman, but she had no more desire to arouse adoration than she had to render it.

She had told Mrs. Vearing that she should never marry again because of dear Theodore, and Mrs. Vearing was impressed by dear Mrs. Bonham's constancy as fully as was Mrs. Bonham herself. Neither of them knew—at least Mrs. Vearing did not know, and Georgina did not recognize—that it was not dear Theodore, but Dorrie, who had held Dr. Rayke and his contingencies at arm's length.

It was part of Mrs. Vearing's success as a friend that she never did know anything about Georgina that Georgina did not herself recognize : it made her what Georgina called sympathetic, and it had the result of causing Georgina to confide in her. She consulted Rayke, but confided in Mrs. Vearing. And as Rayke to Mrs. Bonham, so was Mrs. Bonham to Mrs. Vearing, while as Mrs. Vearing to Mrs. Bonham, so was the Vicar to his wife. Mrs. Vearing consulted Mrs. Bonham and confided in her husband, who looked upon her as a model of feminine intuition. He, in his turn, consulted her, drinking in her ideas as to parish activities, and, needing a confidant on subjects purely masculine, confided in Rayke.

So that these four people, if they did not square the circle, circled a square ; and of the square Rayke was the vital point, the alpha and omega. From him wisdom, natural to his manhood and developed and increased by his London experience, was transmitted to Mrs. Bonham ; from Mrs. Bonham it was passed on to Mrs. Vearing, from Mrs. Vearing to the Vicar ; and through the Vicar was returned, unrecognized and unrecognizable, in the forms of questions or remarks, to Rayke. And as the four friends were on the crest of the wave of Stottleham society, Rayke may be said to have coloured the ideas of Stottleham.

It was in accordance with custom, with the unwritten laws and the unnoted traditions of the four, that on the day after Rayke had been to tea with Mrs. Bonham, Mrs. Bonham should go to tea with Mrs. Vearing.

CHAPTER VIII

Mrs. BONHAM, after the Guild meeting, had suggested Thursday for going to tea with Mrs. Vearing and talking over the problems of the Committees and the heads of tables. In the forefront of her mind was the knowledge that it was her first free afternoon, and in the background was the consciousness that she would want to tell Mrs. Vearing the result of her consultation with Dr. Rayke. As to that consultation, she had as yet made no communication to Mrs. Vearing; her confidences were almost always after the event. It was this partial reserve which gave her, in Mrs. Vearing's eyes, a certain inscrutability, and which added to Mrs. Vearing's admiration and esteem: the breaches in Mrs. Bonham's confidence made her feel the more honoured in its observance.

Georgina set out for the Vicarage pervaded by pleasurable emotions, in a frame of mind comfortably calm. The nervousness of yesterday had entirely gone. She was never nervous with Mrs. Vearing, for Mrs. Vearing always understood her point of view and her difficulties, or at any rate never showed that she did not understand. She had moreover a great deal to decide as well as to confide, and was too full of a sense of authority to feel nervous.

The confidence would come first, for Dorrie and Nurse and the nursery governess that was soon to be far outweighed in importance the susceptibilities of Mrs. Markham and Miss Pottlebury and the intricacies of the Needlework Guild. Until Mrs. Bonham had disburdened herself of her designs on Nurse, she felt she could not give proper attention to the Guild

workers. It was only design as yet; full blown and determined and therefore meet for confidence, but not yet consolidated in action.

After Rayke had gone on the previous evening, Georgina had not felt herself prepared to tackle Nurse, and Nurse must be tackled before anything was said to Dorrie. She wanted to think things over, to map out plainly the plan of the contemplated campaign. That same evening was too soon to take proceedings; and the next morning—well, the morning was not a good time. Evening was the time; you went to bed after crossing the Rubicon, and got up the next morning on the other side. That evening, after leaving the Vicarage—no, after Dorrie had gone to bed, she would tackle Nurse. And before the evening was the afternoon, with confidences, discussion, decisions. The day was big with importance.

Mrs. Vearing was waiting for her friend in a drawing-room, the general effect of which was pink chintz and white muslin curtains. The frills on the curtains betokened an aspect—if not the main aspect—of Mrs. Vearing. She was a soft, fair and slender woman, inclined to dainty tastes and with a love of prettiness. Sprigged muslin would have expressed her, and though she did not often wear it on her physical frame—because of the washing—the astral woman of her was constantly garmented in its inner significance.

"Dear Mrs. Bonham," she said when Georgina came in, "I have been waiting and expecting you since half-past three." It was now ten minutes to four.

"Dear Mrs. Vearing," said Georgina, "you know I always lie down after lunch, and then—except on Guild days—have Dorrie with me for an hour."

"I know you are a model mother, but I thought—

the fact is I was so terribly afraid of something happening to prevent your coming."

"What *should* happen?" Mrs. Bonham asked. "Besides, I should have sent you a note."

"Yes, I know—of course. It's only my stupid anxiety. . . . Now, would you rather stay here or sit in the arbour? It's *sweet* outside to-day."

"You don't think the arbour is damp?" questioned Georgina.

"Oh no; the sun's been on it all the morning. But if you feel the *least* afraid, dear Mrs. Bonham——"

The friends, though they had been friends for years, still addressed each other as "Mrs." It was part of Georgina's reserve, of what Mrs. Vearing called her dignity. Often Mrs. Vearing had longed to say, "Oh, do call me Alicia!" but always the thought that the request carried with it a suggestion that she on her side should call Mrs. Bonham Georgina had caused her to refrain from uttering it. If Mrs. Bonham were willing to be Georgina, the intimation of her willingness must come from Mrs. Bonham; it could not be forced or even invited by Mrs. Vearing, who, longing for the outer sign of intimacy, consoled herself a little for its absence by the frequent prefix to the formal Mrs. of "dear."

Dear Mrs. Bonham, after a moment's reflection, agreed to the arbour. The term arbour was characteristic of Mrs. Vearing and not at all of the retreat to which she proposed to take her friend: it was, in fact, a substantial seat, protected by a wooden back and sides from all the winds of heaven save those of the south, from rain and sun by a roof, from damp underfoot by a substantial brick floor. The Vicar was subject to chills, and when his wife had insisted

upon an arbour, this was what he had provided her with, knowing that he would be expected, when the sun was bright but the wind not free from fridity, frequently to take his tea in it. It was far from the arbour which Mrs. Vearing had built in the air, of uncertain angles, of trailing plants and climbing roses; it was not an arbour at all; but she clung to the name, finding in it a reflection of the might have been.

To the arbour the two ladies went. The sun shone full in their faces, so that Mrs. Bonham had to pull over her eyes the hat which was meant to be worn "off" her forehead. Mrs. Bonham did not like doing this; it appeared to her slightly indecorous; but it was warm in the arbour, warmer than in the drawing-room where Mrs. Vearing had dispensed with a fire, and she objected to chilliness. She had her reward, for Mrs. Vearing, while Georgina was still fiddling with her hatpins, insisted upon fetching the holland flap, destined to hang from hooks on the arbour's front beam in summer time; and thus was dear Mrs. Bonham enabled to restore her hat to its proper place, and her mental attitude to its normal equilibrium.

CHAPTER IX

THUS comfortably seated, Mrs. Vearing made a plunge into the subject of the Guild.

"I've been thinking it all over," she said; "in fact, it kept me awake for ever so long on Tuesday night——"

Here Georgina interrupted her. "I have a great deal to say about the Guild, and we'll discuss it fully—but presently, if you don't mind. Before we go into that, there's something I want to tell you."

Mrs. Vearing was all eager agreement. In a trice she had switched herself off from the Guild and on to the something else. Dear Mrs. Bonham was about to confide in her, and of all things in the Stottleham world she delighted in the confidences of dear Mrs. Bonham.

This one seemed to her particularly interesting, particularly intimate. Hanging on dear Mrs. Bonham's words, she seized upon and realized the subtleties and difficulties of the situation; more completely than had Rayke; more completely perhaps than Georgina herself. She was quicker in feeling than either, and involuntarily appreciated the position of Nurse while she sympathized with Mrs. Bonham. She was indeed within measurable distance of getting herself into hot water on the point of Nurse.

"Poor woman!" she remarked; "I'm afraid she'll feel it dreadfully."

"Poor?" There was a trace of hot water in Georgina's tone. "She ought to be deeply thankful that I am not turning her away. Most people would."

"Of course, of course. I know, dear Mrs. Bonham, there are few who would be so considerate as you——"

"Especially," Georgina went on, "as I cannot help feeling that Nurse is careless."

"Careless!" exclaimed Mrs. Vearing. "Why, I thought——"

Again Mrs. Bonham interrupted her. "You remember, a week or two ago, Dorrie getting hold of that bottle—the stuff the doctor gave Hannah for toothache—poison. I forget what was in it——"

"Anconite and iodine," broke in Mrs. Vearing. "You told me at the time. I remembered the iodine because my glands were painted with it when I was

a child ; and aconite stuck in my mind because of the dear little flowers in the garden."

" I daresay," said Mrs. Bonham coldly : she objected to being pulled up in the middle of a sentence. " I don't pretend to be learned in drugs. But I know it was poison. Dr. Rayke said it would have stopped the heart's action. Most careless, I considered it, of Nurse."

" But I thought you said that Dorrie climbed up on a chair and opened the cupboard. And the night nursery cupboard is so high up that I suppose she thought——"

" She had no business to think," said Mrs. Bonham, who, objecting to being broken in upon, made no bones about breaking in on those less intelligent than herself, and Mrs. Vearing was less intelligent. " She had no business to think of anything except locking it up. Why, if Dorrie had drunk it—and you know what children are—it might have been her death. I told Nurse so."

" What did she say ? "

" Nothing—except that she was sorry or something of the kind. She has a way of saying nothing, or almost nothing, which is very aggravating. But it helped to make me feel that a change was imperative."

" No doubt you are right, dear Mrs. Bonham ; you always are. But I am afraid Nurse cannot but suffer in giving up the care of so sweet a child as Dorrie."

" She will see her every day—see her, you may say, as much as I do. And you know what Dorrie is. The difficulty will be to make *her*, in a sort of way, give up Nurse—I mean Hannah—to induce her to keep away from her."

" Yes indeed ; that will be the difficulty ; *les*

défauts de ses qualités, as the French say. But you couldn't wish her to be less clinging, less affectionate."

Georgina could and did wish that Dorrie were distinctly less affectionate and clinging in the direction of Nurse, but she did not say so to Mrs. Vearing. She had to pay the penalty of being put on a pedestal by remaining on the pedestal at moments when it would have been much more congenial to her to jump down and flaunt or stamp about upon the lower earth. She did not exactly wish to stamp at this moment, but she decidedly did not want sympathy expended on Nurse; the full sum of Mrs. Vearing's sympathy, she felt, was due to herself.

She answered in a non-committal way: "How could I wish Dorrie to be different from what she is?"

And Mrs. Vearing responded: "How indeed!"

"Nurse, as you say," she went on, "is so much better off than most people in her position. And she can stay on as housemaid and become an old family servant. Perhaps," said Mrs. Vearing with the beaming countenance of a happy inspiration, "perhaps become Dorrie's maid when she is grown up."

Mrs. Bonham, in her confidence, had not confided the temporary character of Nurse's transformation; the time for that part of the project was not yet ripe. So all she said was:

"Time enough to think what will happen when Dorrie is grown up. The child is only six."

"Yes indeed," said Mrs. Vearing. She sighed. "My own little dears would have been seven and eight."

Georgina echoed the sigh; it was her way of showing sympathy. She was sorry for Mrs. Vearing, but at the same time she did not want to encourage her to

talk of her dead babies. In Mrs. Bonham's opinion infants who had died, one before birth and the other immediately after, should not be perpetually mourned ; it was a little morbid of Mrs. Vearing to become tearful when she talked of them, especially considering that it was seven years since the last baby had looked into and departed from the world ; and that Mrs. Vearing *would* become tearful, Mrs. Bonham knew.

It was a welcome relief when the Vicar came out to say that tea was ready.

"I've had the fire lighted," he said as they entered the house. "The drawing-room struck me as a bit chilly."

"Oh, Adam," said Mrs. Vearing, "I thought it looked so sweet and summerlike with only the flowers and the clean curtains."

"Clean curtains don't keep one warm. Do they, Mrs. Bonham ?"

"I think one needs a fire towards evening," said Georgina, "though really these last few days have been almost as warm as June."

"June isn't always warm."

Mr. Vearing went on to recall Junes of capricious character, and the weather, gardens and farming prospects kept conversation going throughout tea.

When tea was over Mrs. Vearing exchanged glances with Mrs. Bonham and then said : "Adam dear, I suppose you're going to have a smoke. There is a fire in the study, I know, for I told Bessie to be sure and light it."

"I suppose that means that you want to get rid of me." Mr. Vearing got up. "Secrets—confidences ? Eh ?"

"Business," said Georgina with a touch of tartness. She liked to be taken seriously.

"And not my business, obviously." Mr. Vearing held out his hand. "In case I don't see you again."

He turned to his wife. "I suppose you won't be wanting me for a time. I think I'll go round and have my smoke with Rayke."

"Secrets, confidences, eh?" said Mrs. Vearing.

The Vicar looked at her with a smile which meant: "What a bright amusing woman you are!" shook his head as much as to say: "There's no getting over you," and went out of the room, shutting the door with a bang.

"Adam will bang the door," remarked Mrs. Vearing apologetically, "except when he remembers, which is hardly ever, unless I have a headache. It's one of the things I've never been able to break him of. I suppose his mother didn't when he was a child, and unless you're broken as a child—— I hope it didn't startle you, dear Mrs. Bonham?"

"Oh no, thank you. I'm not nervy, I'm glad to say. Besides, it isn't the first time I've heard your husband close a door."

"You have so much self-control," said Mrs. Vearing. "I wish I was like you."

Mrs. Bonham smiled affectionately: she preferred Mrs. Vearing's aspirations to her reminiscences.

"And now to business," she said.

CHAPTER X

MRS. VEARING, more than willing to take up the subject of Guild diplomacy, entered upon it eagerly.

She had been thinking about it, she said, ever since she and Mrs. Bonham had parted ; at night when she should have been asleep ; by day when her thoughts should have been with the housekeeping or the parish ; and she was sure, perfectly, absolutely sure that dear Mrs. Bonham's plan was the right one.

Mrs. Bonham became judicial. Tentative with Rayke, she was weighty with Mrs. Vearing : feeling her femininity as moonlight to the sunlight of Rayke's masculine mind, she considered Mrs. Vearing to be in regard to herself as water unto wine—the water being aerated : and it was with the calmness of claret that she considered the bubbling effervescence of Mrs. Vearing's conclusions. Calm was necessary, and comprehensiveness, since there were so many intricacies in Guild politics and so many troubled elements.

"I quite agree with you," Georgina said, "that my plan of annual elections is the best one, but the question is, will some of the ladies who have been heads for years like giving way to others?"

"It would be ever so much fairer——" began Mrs. Vearing, but Georgina interrupted her.

"It isn't fairness that matters so much," she said, "as peace."

"Dear Mrs. Bonham," Mrs. Vearing exclaimed admiringly, "you always hit the nail on the head. Of course it is. Though, at the same time, I should like to be fair, if I *could*."

"Of course. But it's no good breaking up the Guild. Now Mrs. Charles Marsden, for instance."

Mrs. Vearing at once saw the importance of not upsetting Mrs. Charles Marsden. Mrs. Charles Marsden was one of the leading ladies of Stottleham and of a disposition likely to feel and show resentment if not

for a walking-on part. It would be difficult to dislodge her without imperilling the welfare both of the Guild and society.

Miss Pottlebury was not in the highest set, but she taught in the Sunday School; if shelved in favour of Mrs. Markham, she might retaliate by giving up her class. Teachers were not too numerous, and the Vicar, Mrs. Vearing intimated, cared more about the Sunday School than the Guild. Mrs. Markham on the other hand could not be passed over. She, no more than Miss Pottlebury, was socially considerable, but then she subscribed liberally to church charities and was a strong financial supporter of the Guild: she was substantial if undistinguished.

Besides these ladies there were many others, either in or wishful to be in positions of authority; and as there were only six tables and therefore but six prominent positions, the problem Mrs. Bonham and Mrs. Vearing had met to discuss seemed, as they discussed it, wellnigh insoluble. Yet Mrs. Bonham found a solution.

"So brilliant!" Mrs. Vearing said.

The solution was a compromise; one which maintained the autocrats, yet pandered to the democracy. Three tables were to be permanent posts; the headship of the others was to be only for a session, the heads being elected. Thus those members whom it would not be safe to unseat were left in possession, while the rivalries of Mrs. Markham, Miss Pottlebury and the rest would be relegated to the ballot. The only doubt in Mrs. Bonham's mind was in regard to the balloting; the ballot-box was vaguely connected in her mind with revolutionary ideas. But then, as Mrs. Vearing remarked, "we could do it without a box."

"Ye—yes," said Mrs. Bonham.

Anyhow, revolution in the vague was better than ructions concretely definite: moreover it was she herself who had started the idea of the ballot, and she could not go back on it. So the ballot was passed.

"What *will* Adam say?" said Mrs. Vearing. "He *will* think it clever of you."

What Adam actually did say, when his wife told him that the Guild problem was settled, was "Thank the Lord!"; but when the Vicar was exclamatory Mrs. Vearing did not always repeat his words to dear Mrs. Bonham.

CHAPTER XI

As Georgina neared the Beeches—so her house was styled—the Guild, the ballot, Mrs. Vearing and Stottleham as a whole receded further and further into the background of her consciousness, and at last, as she reached the gate, disappeared entirely, giving place to one only figure which filled it altogether.

It would have been absurd for Georgina to feel any trace of nervousness in regard to the approaching interview, so absurd that she refused to admit even the possibility of such a sensation. She *had* been a little nervous before discussing the subject with Rayke: with Rayke, all things considered, it had been excusable. But Nurse!

Mrs. Bonham was a woman who was accustomed to consider her servants from her own standpoint and not at all from theirs. Even-tempered and not too exacting, a not unkindly mistress, she had never had any hesitation in finding fault with a servant who did

not please her, or in dismissing one who needed no fault-finding to suit her own convenience. Emma, the present housemaid, was admirably efficient, but Georgina had no compunction in shifting her to make room for Nurse. She was making different arrangements; that was what she would say to Emma. It was equally simple to say the same thing, in effect, to Nurse; even simpler, if greater simplicity were possible, since Nurse, she was persuaded, would agree to any terms which permitted her to remain in the neighbourhood of Dorrie. If she didn't, so much the worse for Nurse, and so much the better for Georgina. It was therefore all perfectly plain sailing.

Nevertheless Mrs. Bonham *funked* the interview. She would not have used the word, but it exactly denotes the state of mind which she declined to admit. To say that she *funked* the interview is another way of saying that she *funked* Nurse. A quite ordinary woman was Nurse, quiet, respectful, conscientious; more sparing of words perhaps than was quite ordinary, and more than ordinarily tender—at any rate where Dorrie was concerned. Georgina, who had watched her carefully and closely when she first took charge of Dorrie, knew her through and through—or thought she did. In the part of Georgina to which thought did not penetrate there was a secret doubt whether she did know Nurse. Something there was in Nurse that baffled her, something she did not understand. She resented that something and a little feared it. Georgina herself, devoted to Dorrie, constant in her affection, faithful in friendship, was without the capacity for passion. Nurse, it may be, had it, and it was the presence of this uncomprehended quality, perhaps, the sense that in Nurse's make-up was a factor

absent from her own, that caused her disquietude. Whatever the cause, the disquietude was there. Mrs. Bonham told herself that she was uneasy because she was afraid of hurting Nurse: in truth, she was not completely certain that Nurse would not hurt her.

Mrs. Bonham's cutlet was not as well fried as Cook generally fried it that evening; the soup was a trifle greasy, the omelette a little overdone: so she told herself, failing to enjoy her dinner as much as usual. She dispensed with dessert, but having drunk her customary glass of claret, poured herself out an extra half-glass.

When Janet brought her cup of coffee to the drawing-room, she said:

"Please ask Nurse to come and speak to me as soon as she's finished putting Miss Dorrie to bed."

Mrs. Bonham was still sipping the coffee when Nurse came into the room.

"Janet says you wanted to see me, ma'am."

"Yes, Nurse. Please sit down!"

Nurse at once sat down; a woman of thirty-eight, with brown smooth hair, a homely ordinary face and unusually steady eyes. Georgina wished the eyes were a little less steady, for Nurse was looking at her.

"I wanted to speak to you, to have a little talk with you, about Miss Dorrie."

Mrs. Bonham's manner was a touch more lofty than usual, more distant and lofty than it usually was with Nurse, who was on a different, a more familiar footing than the rest of the staff.

Nurse answered quickly: "Nothing ails the child." It was as though a doubt had been suggested to her and she cast it from her.

"It isn't her health I want to talk to you about—

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she's as healthy as a child could well be. It's her age."

Again Mrs. Bonham paused, but this time Nurse said nothing.

"She's getting," Georgina went on, "less and less of a baby every day."

Still Nurse did not speak, but into her eyes came a look that is indescribable. At least there is only one way of describing it. If you go to a dog-mother with puppies a few days old and take from her one of the puppies, you will see in her eyes the look that came into Nurse's eyes; only that in the dog's eyes the look is, as it were, full grown, whereas in Nurse's it was tentative.

As Nurse did not speak, Georgina had to go on speaking.

"She is six," she said.

"The twenty-third of last September," said Nurse.

"Not so very far from seven," Georgina continued.

It was because the inference was so obvious perhaps, the present month being April, that Nurse considered assent unnecessary.

"She ought to have more regular sort of lessons than I can give her."

Into Nurse's face, which had been winter, came a swift ripple of spring.

"A governess——?" she hazarded, the words coming less as a question than as though she guessed the answer to a riddle.

"A *nursery* governess," said Mrs. Bonham.

Winter was back again, bleak and desolate, in Nurse's face: her eyes, fortunately, no longer looked at Georgina, but on the floor. They were still on the floor when she stood up, stiff and rigid, but giving

Georgina the uncomfortable impression that at any moment she might fall down.

"Am I to go, ma'am?" asked Nurse. She spoke under her breath, not in a whisper, but as though she had lost her voice from cold.

"No," said Georgina. She added: "Please sit down!"

Nurse obeyed; she was no longer rigid, but trembling.

And then Mrs. Bonham explained. It was easy enough, now that the ice was broken and that Nurse, having faced and feared the worst, would look upon anything short of it, if not as the best, still as very good. Mrs. Bonham took up again with confidence her usual tone of authority, and Nurse returned to her accustomed deference; a deference which had been not so much waived as swamped by a sentiment of larger import. Nurse then, withdrew to her ordinary limits as Mrs. Bonham enlarged her borders.

Nurse agreed to everything: to the housework, to which she was not used, to the laying out and putting away of Mrs. Bonham's "things," to the giving up—after a time and gradually—of the dressing and undressing, the general care of Derrie. It was little, ever so little, to give up the dressing, compared with giving up, altogether and completely, the child she had been used to dress. The bondwoman gave willing, almost eager assent to the conditions of the freewoman. What choice had she? Cast out, she would have been childless in the wilderness, since the child of her heart was the child of the freewoman's body.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Nurse had gone, Mrs. Bonham poured herself out another cup of coffee. It was cold, but she enjoyed it. She had the delicious sense of having come through a bad patch and arrived uninjured on the safe side.

Resting on her laurels, she felt at peace with all the world; nay, beneficent towards humanity. She was disposed towards conviviality: had Rayke come in, or Mrs. Vearing, or, still better, both, she would have given vent to her satisfaction in an unwonted exuberance of spirits. But Rayke never called in the evening, nor did Alicia leave Adam after the evening meal; and it never even occurred to Georgina to go and visit either of them. So there was only the coffee.

The coffee, the extra amount of it superimposed upon the additional half-glass of claret, acted as a stimulant and increased the desire for expansion, for intercourse; to the extent that, when Janet came to take away the tray, Georgina enquired after her mother. Fortunately Janet had a mother, but she was so surprised at the unprecedented interest displayed in her that she was, as she reported later in the kitchen, struck dumb. Recovering herself, she replied with nervous volubility, imparting details as to the state of veins in her mother's legs, from which Georgina shrank. Anything in the way of medical details seemed to her indecent.

The incident, however, sobered her excitement, and when Janet had gone, she was able to take up her work (she was embroidering a frock for Dorrie) and think calmly over the details of her conquest. For

she had conquered all along the line. Nurse had collapsed, capitulated upon every point; as Mrs. Bonham had foreseen. Foreseeing, why then had she dreaded the interview? She did not in the least dread giving Emma notice on the morrow. But she did not waste time or thought upon the point; the interview being over successfully, there was no occasion to dwell upon anything but its success; save only the working out of the altered conditions. And this was a pleasant task.

For another month Nurse would still be Nurse; she could not well be Hannah till Emma had gone. But certain changes Georgina would make at once. Dorrie's bed should be removed on the morrow from the night nursery to the room communicating with Georgina's own bedroom; a dressing-room, but large enough to serve permanently as Dorrie's bedroom. The change would remove her in one fell swoop from a large measure of Nurse's domination. Night-time now would shut out Nurse, and no longer, as heretofore, Georgina. She would feel, as she put it to herself, that the child really belonged to her. On this point, too, Nurse had capitulated, with eyes—thank goodness!—which did not insist upon meeting Georgina's eyes, and with no semblance of showing fight. "Very well, ma'am," she had said, when Mrs. Bonham had mentioned the arrangement.

With completeness she had accepted it, and not only accepted it, but undertaken to make it work. For when Mrs. Bonham, with a suggestion of embarrassment, had hinted at the possibility of rebellion on Dorrie's part, Nurse had said: "You'd better leave Miss Dorrie to me, ma'am."

Nothing could have been nicer on the part of Nurse;

but just here, in those words of hers, lay the tiny sting at the tail end of Georgina's satisfaction. It was Nurse who would persuade the child to adoption of the new conditions, not herself. But the point was a minor one; negligible, inasmuch as it did not affect the issue. Practically Mrs. Bonham was in the position of boss: she could afford to wag the tail in spite of the sting.

She finished Dorrie's dress and went upstairs to bed, putting out the lights on her way.

Outside the night nursery she paused, listening. It would be absurd if Nurse were to make a fuss—and very annoying, disturbing the child. Georgina could not have told why the thought occurred to her that Nurse might be crying, but the thought did occur. If Nurse, however, were being absurd, she was being absurd silently. Not a sound came forth from the night nursery. Georgina, standing with her head bent towards the door, heard the church clock strike eleven. She was later than usual, by half an hour. She put out the last light and went tranquilly to bed.

CHAPTER XIII

On the following afternoon Mrs. Bonham had tea with Dr. Rayke. She had not been invited: she was never invited save when the Doctor gave a tea-party, generally small and always select: it would have been slightly unseemly, a little compromising, to have invited her to tea *à la*. Both Mrs. Bonham and Dr. Rayke felt this, and the fact that an invitation to Mrs. Bonham necessitated an invitation to two or

three other ladies was one of the unwritten laws which regulated their intercourse.

But occasionally, when Georgina was beset with uncertainty or big with tidings, she went to see Rayke, "on business"; and on such occasions she sometimes stayed to tea. And this was perfectly proper. The propriety was demonstrated by the fact that he received her in his study. To have waited for her in the drawing-room, to have said to the maid: "I expect Mrs. Bonham to tea this afternoon," would have denoted familiarity of a kind likely to lead to gossip: but Mrs. Bonham calling unexpectedly, enquiring if the Doctor was at home and not too much engaged to see her for a few minutes on business, was a proceeding of so formal and unsentimental a character as to warrant no false conclusions. That she should stay on to tea was merely proof of her host's hospitality, not of the state of his affections.

Rayke, when Mrs. Bonham arrived, was busy with botanical specimens; so busy, indeed, that he was not overjoyed at being interrupted. Nevertheless he arose with an expression of welcome: there are few friendships quite free of duty, and Mrs. Bonham was not exacting; the duty payable on the pleasure of being her confidential adviser was seldom more than about a farthing in the pound.

"And what can I do for you?" Rayke asked when Georgina was seated in the armchair by the window. "Nothing gone wrong with our little plans, I hope?"

"Oh no, they have turned out most successful. It's because of the success that I ventured to break in upon you, that—in fact I was longing to tell you about it. And I knew you would be anxious to hear."

"Most anxious. Of course," said Rayke.

As a matter of fact he had been so much engaged with his own interests that he had not given a thought to Mrs. Bonham and her affairs all day; but, his advice recalled to him, he was desirous of knowing how it had worked out.

"So all went well?" he enquired.

"Perfectly. Your plan was even more—more——" Georgina's vocabulary was not very wide, and she did not shine in expressing herself.

Rayke helped her out. "Judicious," he suggested.

"That's it. More judicious even than I thought it was."

"A good deal of the success was due to the way you carried it out. You mustn't give me all the praise."

"Oh, I don't know," said Georgina; but she thought she *had* done rather well.

"Oh, but *I* know," Rayke went on. "The fact is, Mrs. Bonham, the combination—you and I working together, pretty well ensured success. The constructive masculine mind and the feminine tact to interpret it—it's ideal."

Mrs. Bonham was gratified; to be the instrument of the masculine mind was in her estimation to scale the summit of feminine attainment. Rayke occasionally raised her to this height, and constantly conveyed to her the impression that, if not on the highest peak, she was at any rate perambulating the lower slopes. It was this appreciation of superiority on Mrs. Bonham's part, the sense of being appreciated on Rayke's, of looking up on the one hand and down on the other, which gave zest to their friendship; and it was a shrewdness common to both which suggested that marriage might shatter their mutual satisfaction.

Georgina, gratified, responded: "At any rate the result was most satisfactory."

Rayke had been standing by the mantelpiece: he now sat down.

"Tell me about it," he said.

Georgina began to tell him; with considerable amplification; acknowledging to him what she had not acknowledged on the previous evening to herself.

"I don't know why, but I really felt almost nervous about telling Nurse."

"It was very natural."

"Well, I don't know. I'm not given to nerves."

"Certainly not. I never knew anyone—no woman, at any rate, more free from anything of the kind. But you forget one thing."

"What's that?"

"That you have a tender heart."

"Nobody," said Mrs. Bonham, "would willingly give pain."

Rayke shook his head, saying with a smile: "You mustn't judge everybody by yourself, you know."

He got up and went over to the bell.

"You'll stay to tea, I hope?"

"Well—really," Georgina began, "I——"

Rayke, pressing the knob, interrupted her hesitations.

"You can't refuse after what you've just said. If you didn't want to hurt Nurse's feelings, you can't deliberately hurt mine."

"What delightful manners he has!" Georgina thought. She replied: "Of course if you put it in that way——"

"There isn't any other way of putting it," said Rayke. "Maud" (to the maid who just then appeared), "Mrs. Bonham will remain to tea. We'll

have it in the drawing-room, and please light the fire."

"Oh, please," said Georgina, "not for me! It seems such a pity——"

"It's for *me*," smiled Rayke. "I don't like taking my tea in a chilly atmosphere."

"But if it were not for me——" began Georgina once more.

"If it were not for you," again interrupted Rayke, "I should have a dull lonely tea, in a dull working-room. Whereas I intend to enjoy myself."

"Then," said Georgina, "I give in. I can't do anything else."

CHAPTER XIV

THE drawing-room was, to Mrs. Bonham, rather a depressing apartment: secretly she much preferred the dullness, as Rake termed it, of the study to the liveliness of the drawing-room. Its only recommendations were that it was exceedingly clean and that it had a bow-window which looked out upon the garden. It was its cheerfulness which depressed her. The cheerfulness was spasmodic. From a carpet of heavy green with a black pattern on it, and from chairs and couches covered with what Dorrie called creepy-crawlies on a black background—for the chintzes of Georgina's choice were only put on in summer—it leapt up into curtains of bright pink damask; it broke into a table-cloth of the same colour, and burst out here and there in cushions of blue and green. An artistic friend had once told Rayke that the perfect room was a dark foundation with dashes of colour,

and the drawing-room was his conception of carrying out the idea. It was one which jarred upon Mrs. Bonham: she was not without taste in the matter of furniture, and had an inborn capacity for making a room look comfortable. The one sure satisfaction she would have had in marrying Rayke would have been the transformation of his drawing-room. In connection with drawing-rooms, she privately thought the masculine mind was best in abeyance. But, having avoided marriage, she avoided criticism. Rayke seldom entered the room; when he did enter it, it was obviously with pleasure.

Entering it now he rubbed his hands.

"More cheerful than the study, isn't it?" he said.

"But I always think the study very cosy," Georgina answered.

She was wishing that Rayke's housemaid were a little—or rather a great deal—less conscientious. For the housemaid guarded Rayke's curtains as if they were her own. There being no mistress, as she expressed it, she was obliged to look after the poor gentleman's things for him, and she looked after them to the extent of keeping the room, for the most part, in semi-darkness, so that the sun had little chance of softening the brilliance of curtains, table-cover and sofa-cushions. To-day, irradiated by the spring sunshine, all these seemed to Mrs. Bonham specially resplendent.

Rayke looked round him with a smile.

"Nothing like touches of colour," he said, "for making a room look bright."

"Or a garden," answered Georgina, whose eyes were directed towards the bow-window. "How splendid your hyacinths look!"

"Not bad, are they? Ah, here comes the tea. Would you like the table near the fire or by the window?"

"The window, please. It's not cold enough to sit over the fire."

It was customary, when Mrs. Bonham took tea with Rayke, for her to pour out the tea, and she took her place in front of the tea-tray as a matter of course.

"And now," said Rayke, when both were supplied with tea and buttered toast, "let's hear how you managed Nurse."

"Well, she came in," said Georgina, "looking quite like herself, as if she thought I was going to talk to her about Dorrie's clothes. I'm sure she didn't expect in the least there was going to be anything unusual. I don't know that the idea of leaving had ever entered her head."

Rayke said: "Probably not. Though you would have thought that such an idea *might* have occurred to her."

"Yes, you would, wouldn't you? Anyhow, when I asked her to sit down, she sat down as if—well, as cool as a cucumber; though generally she stands when I send for her."

"It made it," Rayke remarked, "rather difficult for you to begin."

"It did; of course; and—you see, I don't suppose those kind of people have much imagination. Even when I spoke of Dorrie getting bigger and all that, she didn't seem to realize."

"No doubt she thought herself a fixture. That's what I *thought* she'd think."

Rayke spoke with the complacency of the prophet whose prophecies have come to pass.

"And even when I said that Dorrie required more regular lessons, she only thought of a governess as well as herself."

"It was very dull of her."

"It was very disconcerting. If a person doesn't give you a lead it's so—so—"

"Yes, I know," said Rayke.

"But she did give me a sort of lead when she asked if Dorrie was to have a governess—No, not cake, thank you. May I go on with the toast?"

"I know my cakes can't compare with yours, but this one, by the way it cuts—"

"Oh, but they're *excellent*," said Georgina. "It's only that the toast's so good. I'll have a piece presently if you won't be shocked at my appetite."

"My dear Mrs. Bonham!" Rayke shook his head at her across the table: the shake said: "Now, can you imagine my so misunderstanding you?"

Mrs. Bonham responded with an answering shake, and a smile. Archness was not in her nature, but—very occasionally—there was a hint of archness in her manner to Rayke.

"Well?" Rayke said.

"Where was I?" asked Georgina.

"Where Nurse had asked about a governess."

"Oh yes. Well, that gave me an idea. I said, 'a nursery governess.'"

"I presume that *did* make her think you might contemplate a change?"

"Yes. All of a sudden. I think it must have come like a sort of thunderbolt. She stood up—she almost frightened me."

"So long as she didn't fall down," said Rayke.

"That was the funny part; I felt as if she might."

"But she didn't?"

"No, she didn't. But I asked her to sit down again, in case. I had the feeling she might, and it would have been so very awkward."

"Yes indeed. And then?"

"Well then, you see, the ice was broken."

"I suppose," said Rayke, "she burst into tears."

"No, she didn't."

"No?" Rayke pondered. "I rather expected tears," he said. He was almost disappointed. Here was a forecast which had not come off.

"So did I," agreed Georgina, "but I'm glad to say there weren't any. She looked rather upset, something like she does when she has toothache. By the way I wish she'd have her teeth *out*; it would be much more satisfactory."

"And much more healthy."

"But she won't: she only says that no dentist's teeth are as good as your own. Which is ridiculous."

"It depends," said Rayke, his eyes on Mrs. Bonham's mouth.

Georgina smiled slightly. "Oh, as long as they're *sound* of course. . . . Well, what was I saying? Oh, about the crying. Oh no, she was no more crying than you are."

"Very extraordinary. Perhaps she didn't care so much after all—not nearly as much as you thought she would."

"I—I don't know," said Georgina with hesitation. She had the feeling that Nurse had cared, did care, but she had no reason for the feeling which she could formulate to Rayke—or indeed to herself. "The point is," she added, "that Dorrie cares."

"Of course, of course. That was the point all the way through."

"The thing will be to get a nursery governess she can really take to, somebody who will—sort of——" Mrs. Bonham came to a standstill: neither her vocabulary nor her mind permitted subtlety of expression. Nor, to any large extent, did Rayke's, but he had less compunction than Georgina in being flat-footed.

"Put Nurse's nose out of joint," he suggested.

Mrs. Bonham coloured slightly. A flush improved her, relieving her sallowness. Rayke agreed with Mrs. Vearing that dear Mrs. Bonham always looked her best when she was a little confused, and thought she looked very nice now with her pink cheeks. He thought too that she was pleasantly disingenuous and feminine when she said:

"I don't want to hurt Nurse."

"I know you don't," replied Rayke, and it did not occur to him that the insincerity he discerned in Mrs. Bonham's disavowal was present in his own.

"I only want to break this exaggerated sort of clinging to her on the part of Dorrie, so that later on, when she has to go, there will be no disturbance."

"If the tie were really broken," said Rayke, with a flash of inspiration, "there would be no need for her to go. I mean if she turns out a good housemaid."

"Per—perhaps not," said Georgina. Again she had an instinctive feeling that though it might be possible to break Dorrie from clinging to Nurse, it would never be possible to prevent Nurse from clinging to Dorrie; but again the feeling did not shape itself into an idea that she could express. She got up from the tea-table

"I mustn't trespass any longer on your time."

"Trespass? My dear Mrs.——"

"And besides, Dorrie will be expecting me."

"I thought," Georgina said as she put her gloves on, "that you would be interested—like to know——"

"More than ^{all} rested."

"And then it's always a relief to tell things."

"Well, I congratulate you," Rayke said on the way to the front door. "You pulled it off with admirable tact."

Mrs. Bonham smiled: she was inclined to agree with him.

CHAPTER XV

"Mummy," said Dorrie, "you're very late."

"Have you been waiting for me, darling?" It was pleasant to Georgina to think that Dorrie had wanted her.

"Of course," Dorrie answered. "If you wasn't there, I *had* to wait."

"I had tea with Uncle Rayke, and I had a great deal to talk to him about."

To this statement Dorrie made no reply: it was of so obvious a nature as to call for none. That Mummy should have much to tell Uncle Rayke was part of the natural order of things; the miracle, the extraordinary occurrence, would have been if Mummy had announced that she and the Doctor had had nothing to say to each other. Leaving the commonplace on one side, Dorrie went straight for the subject which was filling her own mind.

"Nurse says——" she began; but Georgina interrupted her.

"Come into the garden with me, darling. I want to have a little talk with you."

To be sure she had left it to Nurse, as Nurse had suggested and her own wisdom had dictated, to convey to Dorrie the first intimation of the changes about to take place; in Nurse's language—language which a little jarred upon Georgina—to "break it to her": but in discussing these changes she was anxious to disabuse Dorrie's mind of any idea that Nurse was the potentate, and she, Dorrie's mother, the pawn. The child, having received the information by means expedient but regrettable, must be induced to consider that information from a correct and wholesome point of view: Georgina, if argument were necessary, preferred to plead as plaintiff rather than defendant.

She desired, therefore, to lead the conversation, giving prominence to what in the situation ought to be prominent. But it was not easy, as she found when she wanted to begin; she did not, in fact, know how to begin at all. So long was she in beginning that Dorrie, holding her hand, pulled it with some impatience.

"Mummy, you said you was going to talk. Why don't you talk, Mummy?"

"Look at the daffodils," said Georgina, "how beautifully they're coming out."

"I don't want daffodils; I want—Nurse said——"

"Yes, yes," said Georgina hurriedly, "I know what Nurse said. Just wait a minute, Dorrie."

There was a little seat at the end of the walk.

"We'll sit down for a bit," said Georgina. She seated herself, and Dorrie sat beside her, kicking her feet, which did not reach the ground, backwards and forwards.

"You're getting quite a big girl," Georgina began. "Everybody thinks so,—Uncle Rayke and all."

"Only not big enough to reach down when I sit," said Dorrie. "Flora's bigger than me," she went on, "and so's Sylvia, only Sylvia's older."

"Flora's unusually tall for her age. We go by how old people are more than by their height."

"Is Uncle Rayke older than you, Mummy?"

Georgina felt that she was being drawn away from her main subject: she returned to it.

"Never mind about Uncle Rayke and me. What I want to talk to you about is that you are six years old; more than six, six and a half, getting on for seven; and when people get to that age, they're no longer babies and mustn't behave like babies."

"Mrs. Jarvis's baby sucks its food out of a bottle," said Dorrie. "I saw it. And Mrs. Allen's baby sucks its food out of Mrs. Allen."

"My dear Dorrie——!" began Georgina.

"But I saw it, Mummy, I saw it doing it. You see Mrs. Allen's its mother, and Nurse says——"

"I wish Nurse would be more careful," exclaimed Georgina, exasperated.

"So I know I'm not a baby," Dorrie went on, "because I eat off a plate. You see, don't you, Mummy?"

Mummy's mind was a network of annoyance. That Nurse should have allowed Mrs. Allen . . . not have removed Dorrie if Mrs. Allen . . . that to try to explain to Dorrie the impropriety of Nature's crudities was hopeless . . . children were so impossible . . . that she was not getting on with her talk, or saying anything she wanted to say; all this was producing in Mrs. Bonham a sense of impotent vexation. Clinging to her

self-control, she clung to the sole plank flung out by Dorrie upon a sea of perplexities.

She replied: "You are certainly not a baby. But there are other ways of not being a baby besides eating. Babies sleep in cradles."

"I don't," Dorrie put in. "I sleep in a cot."

"Yes, because you're not a baby. And babies sleep in nurseries——"

"And little girls," Dorrie said eagerly. "Sylvia does, and Flora, and so does Eileen; and me too. Don't I, Mummy?"

"Yes," Georgina agreed. "But you're getting too big for the nursery. That's just what I want to talk to you about. You are big enough now to have a room of your own."

"Sylvia hasn't," Dorrie began.

"Never mind Sylvia. Very likely there isn't a room she *can* have. But you are to have a room all to your own self, the dear little room that opens out of mine. Won't that be grown up and lovely?"

"Nurse says," Dorrie said wistfully, "it will be great fun."

"And so it will," Georgina, impatient of the quoted authority, was compelled to back it up. "You will be proud to have a room of your very, very own, won't you, darling?"

"Will Nurse tuck me up?" asked Dorrie.

The feeling in Georgina's mind would have been accurately expressed by the words, "Damn Nurse!" but all she said was: "Perhaps—to begin with."

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to hear Nurse breathe," Dorrie said.

"Breathe? What do you mean? Does Nurse snore?"

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"No, I don't think so; not like when you go to sleep on Sunday afternoon. She breathes like this——" Dorrie illustrated her statement. "And when I wake up in the night and want a drink, I know there's somebody there."

"God is there," said Georgina. "You know that, darling—that God is everywhere."

"I want somebody who's only in one place," protested Dorrie.

"Besides, I shall be there." Mrs. Bonham felt that it would be worse than useless to discuss the adequacy of the Divine Presence. "I'll leave the door open," she said.

"If I want a drink, I shall have to call dreadful loud. And if you don't hear, I shall be frightened."

"Frightened? Oh no. Big girls are not frightened."

"Girls as big as me are," Dorrie affirmed.

"There's nothing to be frightened of. Whatever are you frightened of?"

"I don't know zackly, but I *am*."

"If you're frightened, you shall come into my bed. You'd like that, wouldn't you? to come into Mummy's bed?"

"I should have to get there," said Dorrie uncertainly, "across the dark."

"My treasure, if you call, I'm sure to hear you. And if you're frightened ever so little, I'll come and fetch you."

"Really and truly?"

"Really and truly. Darling, Mummy's sometimes lonely and wants you very badly. Won't you like to come and keep Mummy company?"

"I'll come," said Dorrie, "specially as Nurse——"
Georgina seized the child and stilled her words with kisses.

CHAPTER XVI

THE night, to which Georgina had looked forward, was not so agreeable in fact as in anticipation. Dorrie, in spite of her acceptance of the change of bedroom, and of the roseate hues in which Nurse had pictured the change, behaved tiresomely, though of the full extent of her tiresomeness Mrs. Bonham was not aware.

She knew that when Dorrie was brought to her cot in the dressing-room, she insisted upon Nurse tucking her in, knew it because, at the time, she was dressing for dinner. She did not know that a little bell placed on a table by the side of the cot, in case Dorrie should call and nobody should hear her, was repeatedly rung while Georgina was dining; nor that Nurse was finally obliged to remain by Dorrie, holding the child's hand till it relaxed in sleep.

But she knew, later on, what it was to have a disturbed night.

Coming up to bed she found no cause for anything but self-congratulation. For Dorrie at this time was sleeping peacefully. She looked what Georgina called a cherub, and gazing down at the little quiet rosy face, and the plump hand lying outside the bedclothes, Georgina's heart swelled with the joy of full possession. At last the child was her own, her very own; at last she, the mother, had sole charge of her; at last she had got her out of the hands of that woman.

She found herself thinking of the discomfited Nurse as "that woman."

That Nurse was discomfited Georgina had no doubt; she took the discomfiture for granted; but expended upon it no sympathy. For Nurse had no right to Dorrie's affection, no just claim on her presence: if she suffered, her suffering resulted from the deprivation of an encroachment, at best, of a privilege: her grievance, if grievance she had, was not legitimate, and, being illegitimate, demanded no commiseration. She would miss Dorrie, of course. Who could help missing her? But not to the same extent, or anything like it, to which Georgina had missed her, since—this was Georgina's reasoning—Georgina was Dorrie's mother and Nurse wasn't. Moreover she was fortified in her denial of pity by the sense that she had been generous. She might have sent Nurse away, and she had kept her: that she had kept her, not for Nurse's sake but for Dorrie's, was a consideration which, interred in her sub-consciousness, was allowed no resurrection in the sphere of avowed motives.

There was therefore no fly in the ointment of her maternal satisfaction. The fly came later. It revealed its presence soon after Georgina had sunk into her first sleep, a sleep, with her, always profound; and important, inasmuch as upon its being undisturbed depended her night's rest as a whole. From this sleep she was aroused by the buzzing of the fly; in other words by plaintive cries. At first, in the confused half-waking consciousness, she wondered what the sound was, what on earth it meant; then recollection rushed in. She had fallen asleep thinking of the delight of Dorrie's near neighbourhood: this was

part of the delight. Georgina, whose instinctive impulse was to run in the rut of right sentiment, at once told herself how charming it was to be able to minister to her child's necessities.

"Dorrie!" she called. "Darling, is that you?"

"Yes, it's me. *Why* didn't you answer?"

"I was—I— What is it?"

"Oh, do come!" Dorrie cried. "Come at once!"

Georgina, fumbling for the matches, could not at first find the box; then, having found it, fumbled in getting out a match; and the head of the first match came off when she tried to strike it. And all the time from the neighbouring room the call came: "Oh, do come, Mummy! Come quick!"

Everything was against Georgina. Before putting out the candle, she had knocked off a too tall wick; the portion left was so infinitesimal as to make the task of igniting it one of tremulous suspense; when it was ignited, she could move only with slow caution, lest the tiny flame should collapse. Shading it with one hand from the draught, she arrived at last beside Dorrie's cot.

"Oh, Mummy!" said Dorrie, "how funny you look with your hair down!"

"Whatever is the matter?" Georgina asked.

"I woke up and there was nobody there."

"But, darling, you knew I was there, in the next room, close to you."

"No, I didn't, because I didn't know where I was. I couldn't in the dark, could I, Mummy?"

"You could remember, darling, surely, just as well in the dark as in the light."

"I didn't remember, I forgot. And I called Nurse,

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and I wanted a drink, and I thought I was in my very own nursery. And Nurse didn't answer."

"But, darling, you remember?—you must have remembered—that you were in your very own new room all to yourself, next to Mummy, and that Mummy was quite close?"

"Afterwards I remembered, and the more I remembered, the more darker it was and the more I called and called."

"I'm so sorry," Georgina began.

"And you never answered, Mummy, not for ever and ever so long, and you said you would. Nurse——"

"Did you say you wanted a drink of water?" Georgina asked hastily. "Shall I get you one?"

"I'm not thirsty now," Dorrie answered. "I was only thirsty before I was frightened."

"You're not frightened now, though, not any more?"

Dorrie's courage, present in the presence of her mother and the candle, threatened however to depart with the departure of these two custodians of it. Georgina was obliged to fetch a dressing-gown and soothe Dorrie into slumber, as Nurse in the evening had soothed her.

The nights were still cold, and Mrs. Bonham, sitting by the cot, felt herself, in spite of the dressing-gown, getting colder and colder. She was truly thankful when Dorrie's closed eyes and regular breathing allowed her to go back to bed.

In bed she grew warm again, but hardly sleepy; sleep, banished in its first delicious completeness, refused to return; she turned from side to side, growing ever more restless with the unsatisfied desire to rest. She did not realize that she had at last reached the

condition of dimmed consciousness which precedes sleep till she was roused from it by a sound from the next room.

"Mummy," a voice was calling. "Mummy!"

Georgina answered at once. "Yes, what is it?"

It was Dorrie, of course, and she wanted a drink.

The drink administered, Dorrie was seized with an attack of sleeplessness; the extinguishing of the candle seemed to be the signal for her to wake up. Georgina, in the end, was constrained to take the child into her own bed, of the larger part of which, the bed being a single one, Dorrie took possession, sleeping at last profoundly; while Georgina, lying on the bed's extreme edge, was haunted by the possibility, should she be so fortunate as to fall asleep, of being precipitated on to the floor. Lying there, unable to stretch her limbs at ease, and afraid to hazard the waking up of Dorrie by any but the slightest changes of position, she was half tempted to seek relief in the rejected services of "that woman," and, handing Dorrie over to her care, to return to the state of irresponsible independence which seemed to her now to have been entirely unappreciated. The joy of being able to turn over! to stretch herself out and curl herself up! the comfort of being able to sink into the peaceful sleep which she felt was waiting, as it were, round the corner, and would turn the corner speedily if it were given half a chance! Maternity was a privilege and a pleasure . . . and the absolute possession of one's own child undeniably sweet . . . but . . . but . . . Fitfully dozing Georgina was haunted by the "but," and was more than once inclined to let it govern the situation. But pride, and an underlying consciousness of the humiliation

that would come with the morning, prevailed, and in spite of discomfort and fatigue she stuck to her chosen post.

Dorrie, waking in the morning, was first surprised and then, in the daylight, comfortingly pleased to find herself in Mummy's bed. Nurse had said it would be great fun sleeping next to Mummy, and it was—rather. Reminded of her vagaries of the night, with representations of poor Mummy's broken rest, she was sweetly penitent, showering pity and caresses on poor Mummy, and excusing herself in words to which Georgina found no answer.

"You see, Mummy, I didn't know where I was; and when you don't know where you are, you don't know what to do, do you, Mummy?"

BOOK II

THE SUBSTITUTES

CHAPTER I

Mrs. BONHAM's nursery governesses were a source of interest, of speculation, of conversation to all Stottleham.

There was quite a series of them.

The first was regarded as a fixture, for Mrs. Bonham's arrangements were usually stable, and Stottleham suffered a shock of surprise at her abrupt departure. With regard to the second and third of the series, the question was: Will she do? As to the rest, speculation was busied with the enquiry: How long will she stay? "She" changed, not indeed with the rapidity of forms upon a biograph, but with a frequency combining elements of bewilderment and piquancy. For hardly was curiosity centred on the problem of how Miss Jones was getting on, when it was diverted to a channel of expectancy as to the arrival of Miss Brown; and hardly had the outer circles of Stottleham received the information that Dorrie had "taken to" Miss Brown, when already rumours were afloat concerning the advent of Miss Robinson.

Dorrie took to them all, except to Mrs. Flores, who described herself as the widow of a professional man.

Mrs. Flores slapped Dorrie's kitten and then slapped Dorrie for siding with the kitten, with the result that dear Mrs. Bonham came near to slapping that dreadful Mrs. Flores, who left after the shortest of probations and almost, as you might say, without unpacking her boxes.

Dorrie's friendliness towards the many aspirants to the task of teaching her was almost unfortunate, inasmuch as it deprived the changing situation of one element of change and narrowed the range of discussion. If only she had disliked Miss Grey for one reason and shrunk from Miss Green for another, the boundaries of conjecture and comment would have been appreciably enlarged. But she was disposed to like them all; and they all liked Dorrie; always excepting the ill-natured Mrs. Flores. As it was, discussion, conjecture, assertion or hearsay were restricted to the experiences, opinions and remarks of poor dear Mrs. Bonham; for after the exodus of number four, "poor" was frequently prefixed to the "dear," and sometimes substituted for it.

Poor dear Mrs. Bonham really had, for a time, rather a trying time. Her success in wresting the reins of responsibility from the hands of Nurse had been followed by her entry upon a bad patch. The first night of parental responsibility was but a foretaste of worse worries that were to follow. Not that Dorrie persisted in being resolute at night or that Georgina's sleep was unfailingly broken: Dorrie settled down gradually to the new order of things, and Georgina learned how, having been roused to assuage the child's thirst or soothe her fears, to fall asleep again. It was the nightmare of the nursery governesses which disturbed her at night and harried her in the day.

The establishing of a nursery governess had seemed a task supremely simple; the article was so plentiful, the supply apparently unlimited. The answers to her application came in shoals; she had but to pick and choose; and in picking and choosing she had accounted herself an expert. Was she not an expert? or was it that there did not exist, in the ranks of nursery governesses, a breast in which her ideas and opinions upon the education of children could find an echo? Georgina, fresh from the conquest of the nursery, had marched—and at the double—towards success in the schoolroom, and had been pulled up short in the initial encounter with schoolroom forces. Nurse, had she been given to laughing with the gods at the futile efforts of mortals, might, from the citadel of the housework, have laughed at her mistress's efforts; might have, meeting her on the stairs, betrayed by smile or glance a hardly veiled triumph; might, when directed once again to change the sheets on the nursery governess's bed, have said, if not in so many words, at any rate in so many innuendoes: "Ah, now you see!" But Nurse said nothing. She had never been voluble in expressing her opinions; now, as far as domestic politics were concerned, she expressed no opinions at all. She did not even purse her lips when Georgina perforce alluded to the going of Miss This and the coming of Miss That.

There were moments when Georgina almost wished she would, moments when discussion of the situation on any terms would have been a relief, moments when even a gibe on the part of Nurse would have been in effect less unsympathetic than Nurse's inscrutability. But the gibe never came, nor even tempered disapproval. For if Georgina said—and after a time she

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was obliged to say it—: "What do you think of Miss So and So?" Nurse's unvarying reply was: "She seems a nice sort of person, ma'am, so far as I come across her."

Only once was Nurse's composure upset, and that was in the case of Mrs. Flores. Then her crimson cheeks and angry eyes drew Mrs. Bonham towards her as she had never before been drawn; she was in fact tempted to confide to Nurse her perplexities and disappointment; had Nurse expressed her feelings, Georgina might have given vent to hers. But Nurse expressed nothing, save by means of inflamed features; and Georgina, having trembled on the brink of expansion, resumed the mistress's reserve, while Nurse, who had been for a brief space very Nurse, again became Hannah.

As Hannah she was excellent, thorough in her work, careful, conscientious. There were times when Georgina asked herself: "What excuse *can* I make when I want to get rid of her?"

As yet the time of wanting to get rid of her had not arrived. Georgina in fact looked upon Hannah as a sort of reservist; debarring her from active service lest she should take too high a command, there was yet in Georgina's consciousness the shadow, as it were, of contingencies in which Hannah might have to be called up. The contingencies, however, were not yet actual. Through the ranks of registry offices and the flood of advertisements in the "Times" Georgina would go before she called up Hannah, and she was as yet only at the beginning of the resources offered through these two avenues of experiment. In the meantime, though comfort, condolence and a confidante were lacking within the walls of her home, all

Stottleham, or most of it, was longing to condole with and to receive the confidences of dear Mrs. Bonham

CHAPTER II

Of all the sympathizers, Mrs. Vearing was the most tenderly and delicately sympathetic. Dr. Rayke was full of commiseration, but his pity was in excess of his understanding. He was sincerely sorry for Mrs. Bonham; it was hard luck on her; and he wished devoutly (a little for his own sake, as well as for hers) that she could find a suitable person to look after Dorrie. But he did not fully appreciate the difficulties; looking upon the finding of a nursery governess as woman's work, he failed in appraising the obstacles to success, the vexations and disappointments in the path of the seeking woman. In his mind was just a tinge of the suspicion that if Mrs. Bonham was not suited, the fact was due, a little tiny bit, to Mrs. Bonham, or rather to an inherent unsoundness in feminine capacity, even within an entirely feminine sphere.

Georgina can hardly be said to have been conscious of the flaw in Rayke's attitude, but she felt vaguely that the bad patch on which she found herself was the kind of patch somewhat outside the comprehension of the masculine mind. Her tendency to confide in Mrs. Vearing received therefore at this time an added impulse towards outpouring, while her habit of consulting Rayke was checked. She imagined that she did not want to trouble him: what she really did not want was discussion with anyone whose sympathy did

not combine unquestioning commendation with wholehearted condolence.

At the Needlework Guild the sympathy expressed was permeated by both these elements, and at the Needlework Guild, in consequence, Georgina a little bit let herself go. The spirit of criticism, to be sure, was not altogether absent. Miss Truefitt, for instance, who had sniffed slightly over the violets, sniffed more definitely over the immaculate Mrs. Bonham's misadventures; and Mrs. Markham had a secret conviction that she could have handled the situation better than did Mrs. Bonham, for all the latter's social superiority.

But Mrs. Markham's conviction remained secret and Miss Truefitt's sniffs were inaudible, and the sentiments of those who had any leanings towards the views of these two ladies remained—at least during Guild hours—unuttered. Their glances, their gestures and their spoken words revealed during those hours no jot or tittle of dissension from the prevailing attitude; and thus Mrs. Bonham, scenting nothing but sympathy, relaxed her habitual reserve of bearing, and let herself to some extent go in describing the trials which beset her. Thus it came about that the ins and outs of Mrs. Bonham's new arrangements were known and discussed throughout Stottleham. The Needlework Guild formed, as it were, the reservoir into which was poured information from the fountain head, and thence, by as many channels as there were members, was the information distributed in the outer world.

The channels varied in respect of accuracy since within the reservoir were reservations; for Mrs. Bonham did not talk to *everybody*. But she extended

the circle of those to whom she did talk. And she also raised her voice. So that those members who were not directly addressed, either overheard much of what was confided to the elect, or had portions of Mrs. Bonham's utterances passed on to them. The result was that the reports circulated in Stottleham were sometimes conflicting ; and there were arguments as to whether it was number four or number five who had been guilty of a particular delinquency, and as to whether number three had really refused to hear Dorrie say her prayers.

As a matter of fact it was Dorrie who had refused to pray at the knee, not of number three alone, but of all the numbers. If she was a big girl, she was going to say her prayers at a chair, she had declared, and it was the attempt of the unfortunate number three to abrogate a newly acquired privilege, by trying to take the place of the chair, that had caused the trouble. But, except in this instance, Dorrie had hardly been a factor in the difficulties : it was Georgina's anxiety to secure exactly the right person, with exactly the right accent, manner, views, principles, appearance and influence, which caused every fresh broom to fail in complete cleanliness of sweeping at an early date, and sometimes when brand new.

Her carefulness, indeed, was considered by some of her friends to approach to carping. The Vicar, for instance, who was somewhat given to mild joking, remarked to his wife that the odd numbers in Mrs. Bonham's procession of nursery governesses were all odd, but the even numbers were "even" odder : but Mrs. Vearing was so vexed by the hint of a reflection on dear Mrs. Bonham, that the Vicar was obliged to stop laughing almost before he had begun to smile

He consoled himself by repeating his joke (which he privately thought rather good) to Dr. Rayke over a pipe; and Rayke sniggered.

Georgina, had she heard the snigger, would probably never have consulted him again; but she did not, of course, hear it, nor did she conceive the possibility of such an enormity on the part of her friend; and it must be stated that Rayke's sense of loyalty caused him to curtail the sniggering. Curtailing it, he excused himself and Mrs. Bonham in a breath, conveying to the Vicar that, though he was such a funny dog that one couldn't help laughing at his witticisms, Mrs. Bonham, nevertheless, must not be made a target for ridicule. She was a woman, they must remember, and alone. She consulted him a good deal and he helped her all he could, but he couldn't of course look after everything, and women . . . "Yes, yes," agreed the Vicar, "quite so." He had the sense of being ever so slightly snubbed, but he did not mind. He had no desire to ridicule Mrs. Bonham; all he wanted was that his joke should be appreciated, and Rayke *had* appreciated it.

CHAPTER III

It did not enter into Georgina's head that anybody *could* laugh at her. In the first place she was Mrs. Bonham, and in the second place it would have been too unkind. For she was genuinely distressed. Ardently desiring to do the best for Dorrie, she seemed to have happened upon an impossible way of doing it. She began to think that she must abandon that

way—the way of nursery governesses—so many were the Miss Wrongs who darkened her door before the coming of Miss Comparatively Right.

The many who tried and failed were divided into two main classes, the negatively incompetent and the positively deplorable; and of the latter some were made impossible by their vices and others by their views. Georgina hardly knew which were the worse, judging them always from the standpoint of their effect upon Dorrie.

Amongst the vicious was Miss Snell, who smoked in her bedroom. Georgina smelt the smoke, in spite of Miss Snell's cunning precaution of opening the window. She announced her discovery at the Guild, and at once the news went forth to Stottleham; poor dear Mrs. Bonham had smelt the smoke in Miss Snell's bedroom. What an example! Stottleham was rather anxious to see Miss Snell. Women who smoked in their bedrooms were unknown in any society in that town that called itself respectable. What did such a woman look like? It must be confessed that even the Vicar was desirous of seeing Miss Snell. Rayke alone made any attempt to diminish the darkness of her reputation; but then Rayke had lived many years in London and was accounted something of a dog.

Then there was Miss Parkins, who bit her nails. This in itself was a lesser crime than smoking, but as a habit likely to be adopted by an imitative child was perhaps more dangerous. That this was Mrs. Bonham's view was made known to Stottleham through the usual channels, and Stottleham in the main agreed: though there were those who maintained that, from the point of view of morality, Miss

Parkins's nails were as chalk to the cheese of Miss Snell's cigarettes.

It was somewhat hotly debated whether Miss Grey's habit of eating peppermints in church did or did not come within the category of vices. The church set as a whole condemned the practice, whereas the nonconformists were disposed to a view lenient if not sympathetic. But even within the church set there were varying degrees of condemnation, amounting almost to difference of opinion; for Miss Slade, who was "low," declared the peppermints to be merely a weakness, while Mrs. Puckeridge, who was "high," regarded them as a blasphemy. Mrs. Ansell, who was inclined to be "broad," considered it was a matter for Miss Grey's individual conscience. Georgina however, to whom the smell of peppermint was obnoxious, classed the practice as a vice, and Miss Grey followed in the wake of Miss Parkins and Miss Snell.

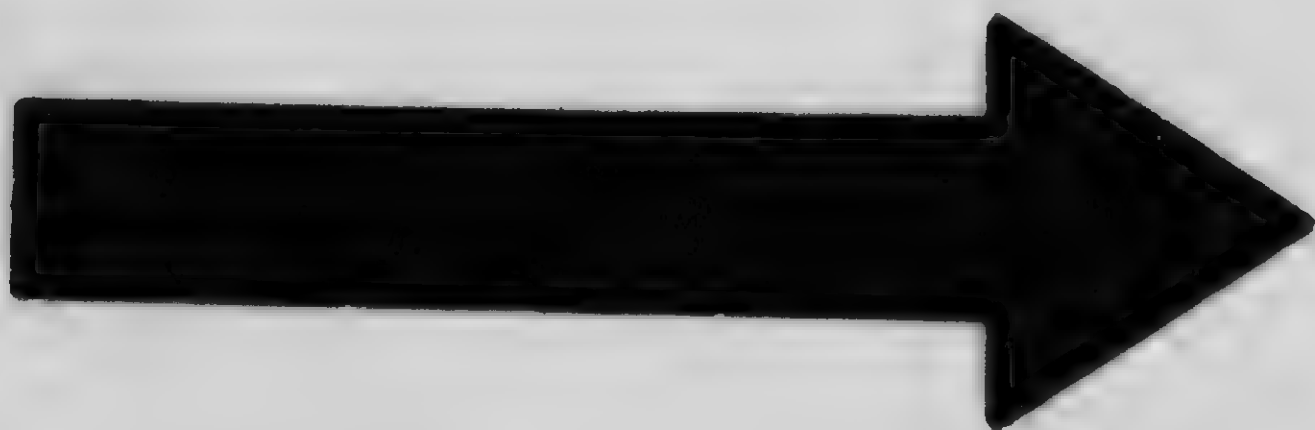
In the end Georgina came to look upon the vices as nothing in comparison with the views. For the vices were patent; you knew what a person was doing; but who could tell what strange and unorthodox, what peculiar and terrible ideas the persons with views might instil into the mind of Dorrie?

The first peculiar person was more a trial than a danger: she was only a teetotaller, and therefore harmless. Georgina did not in the least mind her being a teetotaller; she had no desire to ply Miss Sweedham with the contents of her cellar, and was affable in regard to her preference for water over wine at the one-o'clock meal which was Georgina's lunch and the dinner of Miss Sweedham and Dorrie. What she objected to was not Miss Sweedham's practice but her preaching, her stories and strictures of intemper-

ance; for Georgina had an uncomfortable consciousness that they were levelled against her own harmless glass of claret. Such talk was unsuitable for the ears of a child, and was also ridiculous—in connection with Georgina. As if, said Stottleham, dear Mrs. Bonham *could* exceed!

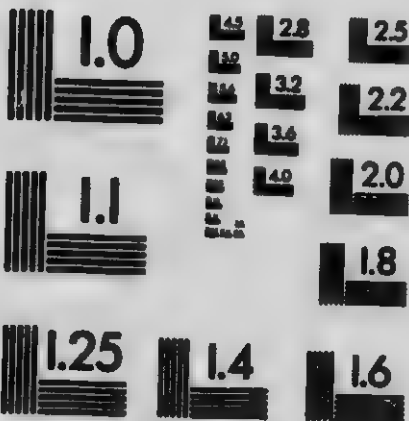
Dear Mrs. Bonham was naturally annoyed—and hurt, and so was Stottleham through and because of her. Impossible to keep such a person! So Miss Sweedham had to go, and Hannah was directed to prepare the nursery-governess's room for a fresh aspirant to the task of educating Dorrie.

On a level with Miss Sweedham was Miss Swayne. Her views no more than Miss Sweedham's could be called pernicious, but they were tiresome, and, like Miss Sweedham, she was a propagandist. Her enthusiasm was in the direction of dress reform, and Mrs. Bonham who had chafed at implied condemnation of her claret was even more irritated by indirect criticism of her corsets. Miss Swayne disdained corsets, with what, in Mrs. Bonham's eyes, were deplorable results. It was not long before all Stottleham knew that Miss Swayne had no waist. Like a pillow she was, with—no, without a string round the middle. So different from dear Mrs. Bonham's rounded lines! Moreover she wore Jaeger nightgowns and had brought with her Jaeger sheets, which were—or were to be—so rumour had it, rarely washed. Perhaps, Miss Pottlebury suggested, Miss Swayne suffered from rheumatism; and Miss Truefitt remarked that she didn't see that it mattered what Miss Swayne wore when she was in bed. But the rheumatism was authoritatively denied; and Mrs. Bonham, it was asserted, did attach importance to her nursery-governess's *ideas* as to under-



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clothing. Supposing Dorrie were to develop a craze for Jaeger, or refuse the support of corsets to her spine? If there was one thing Dorrie was not to be, it was peculiar. So the fiat went forth, and Miss Swayne added one more to the failures.

But in the ranks of the view holders, both Miss Sweedham and Miss Swayne were as nothing to Miss Bootham. Miss Sweedham was only provoking and Miss Swayne's views could hardly be called pernicious; but Miss Bootham was odd. Teetotalism, uncomfortably supererogatory in the domain of respectability, was established and accepted; heaps of quite nice people, even in the best set in Stottleham, drank no wine—Mrs. Vearing for instance. And Jaeger underclothing, though ridiculous and unnecessary, was after all only an exaggeration of the quite respectable axiom that it was well to wear flannel next the skin. But Miss Bootham was an anti-vivisectionist.

She arrived just after the Guild had again met in the autumn, and she provided it with a fresh fund of conversation. Members of the Guild vied with each other in repeating what Miss Bootham had said; how she had asserted that animals had rights, which was almost as dangerous as saying that women had, and even more absurd; how she had declared to be true things which everybody knew to be false; and how she had even said that experiments on animals led to experiments on human beings.

Miss Bootham had said these things to Mrs. Bonham. Mrs. Bonham, while denying Miss Bootham's statements, had said, at the same time, that she should make enquiries. Stottleham declared that it was just like dear Mrs. Bonham to make enquiries: she was always so open-minded.

So Mrs. Bonham enquired of the Vicar and of Dr. Rayke.

The Vicar said he had never heard of any of the things that Miss Bootham had declared to be facts, and Rayke said that Miss Bootham didn't know what she was talking about, and that the subject was one about which the lay public could have neither knowledge nor understanding. Everybody was pleased—except Miss Bootham, for everybody, again excepting Miss Bootham, had been quite sure all along what the result of Mrs. Bonham's enquiries would be.

The outcome of it all was that Miss Bootham disappeared both from the Beeches and from discussion, and that another aspirant entered the lists.

CHAPTER IV

THE aspirant who followed Miss Bootham was, unfortunately, Mrs. Flores, and in the disturbance which originated with the kitten Georgina almost wished for the return of the anti-vivisectionist. But she could not go back, and her only alternative was to go forward; she must try again.

Mrs. Flores's summary departure created a thrill throughout the town; which thrill was succeeded by a positive sensation when the news spread that Mrs. Bonham's latest importation from the advertisement columns of the "Times" turned out to be a suffragist, who had walked in a procession. It was rumoured that she had carried a banner, but the rumour was never substantiated: what was certain was that she had walked.

It seemed the culminating point of poor Mrs. Bonham's misfortunes, for here was a combination of distressing views with unseemly action. It was worse than Miss Snell, even as regarded conduct, for Miss Snell, a smoker, had at least smoked only in her bedroom, whereas Miss Bell had walked in the public streets, with crowds looking on. Miss Truefitt, at the Guild meeting, remarked that you couldn't very well walk in a procession in your bedroom; but Miss Truefitt was speedily flattened out; *that* was a reason for not walking at all.

Miss Bell of course could not be tolerated; she too, as far as Stottleham was concerned, slept with her sisters; and Mrs. Cray, who proved to be the penultimate candidate, reigned in her stead. And this penultimate was the worst of all—almost unspeakably so—because of the things she spoke of. She spoke of physiological facts, and Stottleham had always lived and moved and had its being, physiologically speaking, in fiction.

Mrs. Bonham lowered her voice in speaking of Mrs. Cray's indelicacies, and it was only when indignation overpowered reserve that the Guild Meeting was enabled to be shocked without craning its neck and straining its ears. For Mrs. Cray had conveyed to her charge information of a most undesirable kind, such as that there was sex in plants and that female plants brought forth their young in the form of seeds. But that was not the worst.

"She actually told the child," said Mrs. Bonham, "that sheep carry their lambs!"

"And when I remonstrated with her," Georgina went on, when the highest at the tables had exclaimed "You don't say so," and the humblest "I never!"—

"when I remonstrated with her—for of course Dorrie repeated it—all she said was that it was true. 'True,' I said; 'that is the whole point. If it hadn't been true, it wouldn't have mattered.'"

"But is it?" asked Miss Pottlebury. "How do they—I never saw a sheep carrying——"

Georgina, exasperated, cut short her bewilderment.

"Before they're born, my *dear* Miss Pottlebury," she said. She wanted to say "you ninny," but convention forbade, and she was obliged to restrict herself to "my *dear* Miss Pottlebury," concentrating her annoyance in an emphatic "dear."

Miss Pottlebury retired into a pink silence, while the other members proceeded to enquire *what* Mrs. Bonham had replied when Dorrie had asked if Mummy was like a sheep.

"I said," answered Mrs. Bonham, "that I had carried her in my arms. And when she asked me how she got there, I said she dropped from a star, that all new-born things did."

The readiness, the poetical fancy and the discretion displayed by Mrs. Bonham evoked sympathetic enthusiasm; for Mrs. Charles Marsden said she had never got beyond a cabbage, and Mrs. Ansell had taken refuge in Santa Claus, which was so awkward, she remarked, when a birthday occurred at midsummer. How could Mrs. Bonham think of such a beautiful idea? and on the spur of the moment?

"I don't know," said Georgina sublimely. "It seemed to come to me."

It was in connection with the beautiful idea that had come to dear Mrs. Bonham that the dreadfulness of Mrs. Cray was whispered throughout Stottleham.

But before it reached the outskirts of Society Mrs. Cray had gone, and the ultimate, permanent, long-looked-for nursery governess had arrived.

CHAPTER V

HER name was Miss Kimmidge—Patricia she had been christened, and in her family was called Pat. But Mrs. Bonham knew nothing of her names save the surname—or knew them unknowingly; Miss Kimmidge was to her always and only Miss Kimmidge.

Dorrie knew them though: Dorrie was immensely interested in them. She had never before heard the name of Patricia and thought it beautiful; and Pat . . . Pat she had thought was a boy's name; there was a Pat in Stottleham, the son of Mrs. Saunders-Parr, a splendid grown-up sort of boy who was at Rugby. It was a name associated with big boyhood, and it was most amusing to find it cropping up in a governess.

And Hannah knew that Miss Kimmidge was Patricia, and also, familiarly, Pat. Hannah had found it all out on the very first evening, when she went to Miss Kimmidge's room and said in her usual way: "Can I do anything for you, Miss?"

Her usual way; for to each one of the nursery governesses had Hannah gone, knocked at the bedroom door, and, entering, asked, with the same respectful manner, the same question of the candidate. Some she had liked and some she had disliked, but to all she had presented the same obliging demeanour; as of all, save Mrs. Flores, who speedily had shown her hand, and that a brutal one, she had said, in reply

to Georgina's enquiries: "She seems a nice sort of person."

For how was Hannah to know? Each candidate was a possible permanency, the elected trustee of her treasure; her only chance of communication with the treasure was to stand well with the trustee. Jealous she may have been of the transfer of guardianship, but jealousy, if it were there, was submerged in the devotion which would bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things, for the privilege of proximity, for the sake of a sight of Dorrie. Well she knew that her position was perilous, and fully aware was she that her best chance of maintaining it was to lie low, to be unobtrusive, to be quietly useful to any power that was or might be. In the twinkling of an eye she had been changed from Nurse, the nurse, to Hannah the housemaid; as housemaid she was determined to endure for ever, or at any rate till Dorrie was married to a duke. For this cause she had, in a sense, welcomed nursery governess after nursery governess, never knowing but that each fresh arrival might not be the power elect, on whom it was necessary from the very first to make a favourable impression. For this cause she was willing to remain in the background, the only alternative, as it seemed, to no ground at all. For this cause she had not encouraged Mrs. Bonham, in the moment of expansive emotion created by Mrs. Flores, to give way and confide in her. For Hannah, who did not reason much, had, where Dorrie was concerned, an intuition alert as a watchdog, and it was this intuition which had warned her against allowing Georgina to break down. Georgina, for the moment, would have overleapt the several considerations which had caused her to trans-

form Nurse into Hannah; but Hannah's intuition told her that, the emotion past, she would never forgive herself for the leap, or rather that she would never forgive Hannah: a confession of failure to the dethroned Nurse would have resulted in the forced abdication of the reigning housemaid. So in that emotional crisis Hannah had held her peace, and held back the indignation which clamoured to burst forth and join forces with her mistress's indignation, sensing dimly but surely that, though Mrs. Flores was the primary cause of Mrs. Bonham's wrathful suffering, she herself, as the witness of a momentary weakness, might become its vicarious victim.

Thus it was that Hannah, when Miss Kimmidge had been barely ten minutes in her room, presented herself, and, with the respect which was all that a housemaid could be permitted to exhibit in the way of ingratiation, asked: "Can I do anything for you, Miss?"

CHAPTER VI

SOME of the nursery governesses had been civil, some disagreeable, some had declined Hannah's offer, others had presumed upon it: none had replied to it in the way taken by Miss Kimmidge. Miss Kimmidge was on her knees beside her trunk; she looked up with half a sigh and half a smile and said: "Oh, if you *would*——"

Hannah looked down at her, waiting for a more explicit request, but as only Miss Kimmidge's eyes addressed her, she said enquiringly: "Yes, Miss?"

"I'm dying for a cup of tea," said Miss Kimmidge.

"I'll——," began Hannah, but Miss Kimmidge interrupted her.

"I know the schoolroom tea's over, for Mrs. Bonham said so."

"It is, Miss, but——"

"And it's only half-past five," Miss Kimmidge broke in again, "and I don't suppose supper or whatever I have will be till—for ever so long."

She got up from her knees and sat down on the couch. The room was very comfortably furnished, partly because Mrs. Bonham was careful as to the comfort of her dependents, and partly because she had wished to emphasize the superiority of a nursery governess to a nurse.

"A quarter to eight Mrs. Bonham dines, Miss," said Hannah, "and it's sent up to you when it comes out."

"Mrs. Bonham asked me if I'd like some tea, and I was so stupid—shy, you know, that I said I wouldn't. But now——!"

"I'll get you a cup, Miss, at once."

"You *are* shy, you know," said Miss Kimmidge, "if you've never been away from home before."

"It's only natural," replied Hannah, and went for the tea.

When she returned, the greater part of Miss Kimmidge's clothes were either on the bed or on the floor, and the wardrobe doors were open and all the drawers pulled out. Hannah had to tread warily with the tray.

"I'll put it here, on this little table," she said.

"Cake!" said Miss Kimmidge. "Oh, how *kind* of you. And bread-and-butter you can *bite*." She had a way of stressing words which was engagingly different from Mrs. Bonham's even utterances.

"There's no starch about her anyhow," was Hannah's inward comment.

"Don't go!" said Miss Kimmidge. "Sit down a minute! There isn't anything on that corner of the couch."

Hannah sat down and looked at Miss Kimmidge as she ate and drank. Something un-authoritative about the latest of the nursery governesses encouraged Hannah to the point of initiating conversation.

"You've never been away from home before, Miss, I think you said?"

"No." Miss Kimmidge shook her head as she spoke. "At least, I mean not like *this*. To the sea-side, and paying visits and that sort of thing, but never to a *post*."

"You'll likely feel a bit lonely, Miss."

"It *almost* makes you feel lonely to be where you're called Miss Kimmidge—after being used to be just Pat."

"I thought Pat——" began Hannah.

"Short for Patricia." Miss Kimmidge had finished the bread-and-butter and now began upon the cake. "Delicious!" she said.

"It's a lovely name, Miss," said Hannah. "I don't know as I ever heard it before."

"Rather nice. But I don't think it goes well with Kimmidge. Do you?"

"I couldn't really say, Miss," Hannah answered.

"That's why I so much prefer Pat. Pat Kimmidge sounds as if you were a good sort. Don't you think so? By the way, what's *your* name?"

"Hannah, Miss." Hannah hesitated. "I used to be called Nurse. I was Miss Dorrie's nurse till——" She stopped short.

"What are you now?"

"Housemaid."

Miss Kimmidge looked at her with a look gravely penetrating: then she said:

"You just *hated* giving her up, didn't you?"

Hannah did not answer, but turned her head away, so that she looked out of the window instead of at Miss Kimmidge. Then she advanced to the tray and carried it towards the door. Miss Kimmidge followed her.

"Look here, Hannah," she said, "I shan't interfere."

"No, Miss." Hannah paused. "Only you'll have to." She paused again. "Such being Mrs. Bonham's wish." She stopped in the doorway. "But I shall be pleased to wait upon you, Miss."

"You *shall* wait upon me. Thank you," said Miss Kimmidge.

Left alone, she sat down on the corner of the couch that Hannah had vacated, and drew in her lips.

"It looks as if it were going to be rather difficult," she was thinking . . . "round holes and square people."

CHAPTER VII

THE fitting of people of one shape into holes of another shape was a thing which Miss Kimmidge somehow managed to accomplish; not because she was clever, but, in a great measure, because she was not. She had no settled plan of action, thought out no subtle scheme, but just, as she expressed it, felt her way. The way, in one sense, was not perhaps very difficult to feel, since the obstacles which impeded it were so obvious, or, again as Miss Kimmidge expressed it, they stared

you in the face ; the real problem was to discover the best method of steering through them, as they were certainly too solid to be removed and too high to be surmounted. Hannah had given her a hint of them, and Mrs. Bonham, that same evening, solidified the hint.

Mrs. Bonham, having dined and had her coffee, sent a message to the schoolroom. She would be glad, when Miss Kimmidge had finished her supper, if she would come down to the drawing-room for half an hour. Miss Kimmidge had already finished her supper, and, arrayed in a new white silk shirt and a blue skirt, which she had put on after unpacking, at once went downstairs in obedience to Mrs. Bonham's request.

Mrs. Bonham, as she entered, eyed her with approval. She was nicely dressed, but not too nicely. Mrs. Bonham did not make use of the words "neat but not gaudy," but they would have exactly expressed her verdict upon Miss Kimmidge's appearance ; Miss Kimmidge had, in fact, hit the happy mean in the matter of dress which, according to Mrs. Bonham, was appropriate to a nursery governess in the evening. Moreover her hair was tidy, and what Mrs. Bonham disliked more than anything else was untidy hair—especially in a dependent. Mrs. Vearing's hair was not very tidy—according to Mrs. Bonham's code, for Mrs. Vearing went in for the picturesque in hair-dressing ; yet, though Georgina did not admire the picturesque as expressed in front hair arranged *à coup de vent*, she passed it in Mrs. Vearing because Mrs. Vearing was a vicar's wife and a baronet's daughter. But what was permissible in a somebody would have been unpardonable in a nobody, such as a servant,

and objectionable in a mongrel, such as a nursery governess. Miss Kimmidge's hair, however, was tidy (indeed she wore a fringe net for the purpose of keeping it so), and, her costume being nice, but not too nice, Mrs. Bonham's eyes rested upon her with an approving smile.

"Please sit down, Miss Kimmidge," she said. "I suppose you are too young to care for a chair with arms." But for the tidy hair, Miss Kimmidge would not have been favoured with even a suggestion of arms.

"Thank you," said Miss Kimmidge, "what I like best is a straight back and not too high." She was about to add "My legs are not very long" (Miss Kimmidge was not tall, being under five feet three), but something in Mrs. Bonham's carriage suggested that the mention of a nursery-governess's legs would not be well received. So she stopped short and sat down on a chair which was both low and armless.

"You find your room comfortable?" Mrs. Bonham enquired graciously.

"Very," returned Miss Kimmidge. "It's really sweet."

"The housemaid," Mrs. Bonham went on, "will do such waiting as you require. I hope she has shown herself obliging."

"Oh yes," said Miss Kimmidge. "I think she's a dear old thing."

Hannah was thirty-eight, but to Miss Kimmidge everybody over thirty was a dear old thing or a horrid old thing or a something-else old thing. Dr. Rayke, when later on she met him, she designated a funny old thing, but that was an offence of which Mrs. Bonham never knew.

"Hannah," Mrs. Bonham went on, "is a good servant if kept in her place."

"Yes?" said Miss Kimmidge.

"She was, you know, Dorrie's nurse."

"Ah," said Miss Kimmidge.

"But after six, I don't consider it advisable to leave a child under the sole charge of a person of that class."

"I see," said Miss Kimmidge.

"She was—very naturally—devoted to Dorrie."

"Most naturally," said Miss Kimmidge. "Dorrie is a *duck*."

Mrs. Bonham smiled faintly. The smile was in approval of Miss Kimmidge's appreciation of her pupil; the faintness of it indicated that Miss Kimmidge was a trifle too familiar in her attitude towards that pupil, or perhaps towards the pupil's mother. Anyhow Miss Kimmidge was impressed with the feeling that she ought to have said *darling* instead of *duck*, and that she should have spoken, if not with bated breath, at any rate with a flavour of respect.

"So I didn't wish—I couldn't bring myself to send her away."

"How kind of you!" said Miss Kimmidge, this time with the flavour of respect.

"I felt for her," said Mrs. Bonham. "So I gave her the chance of staying on as housemaid."

"How delighted she must have been!"

"She was pleased, I think. And I must confess she makes a good housemaid."

"Very fortunate," murmured Miss Kimmidge. She was not given to murmuring, but she was finding, as the Needlework Guild had found, that there was something about Mrs. Bonham which induced murmurs.

"It is fortunate," Mrs. Bonham agreed, "for both

of us; for I should indeed be sorry if I were obliged to send her away, knowing, as I do, how devoted she is to Dorrie. At the same time, having removed Dorrie from her care, I don't want the child to be too much, or indeed much at all, in her company. I took her from her care, in fact, to remove her from her company."

"I see," said Miss Kimmidge.

"She speaks commonly. And of course thinks commonly. And Dorrie, in fact, is getting too old to associate with servants."

"So that's where I come in." Miss Kimmidge had almost said it, but she stopped herself in time and substituted: "She's nearly seven, isn't she?"

"She is seven; she was seven in September. So you see the importance."

Miss Kimmidge bent her head.

"I look to you," Mrs. Bonham went on, "to counteract Hannah's influence, to gradually wean her away from her, and to see that Hannah doesn't come fussing about her."

"Is Dorrie very devoted to her?"

"Devoted," said Mrs. Bonham with a smile touched with vexation, "is hardly what I should call her." Miss Kimmidge was conscious that she should have said "fond of" instead of "devoted to." "You know what children are with nurses they've had all their lives. It's habit more than anything else, and Dorrie, like other children, has got to get out of the way of depending on her nurse."

"I see," said Miss Kimmidge. "Have I got to begin it?" she asked. "I mean, am I the first nursery governess? or have there been others?"

"There have been others, but they have not had

much influence in the way I require. *Which,*" added Mrs. Bonham with emphasis, "is one of the reasons why you must be firm. And at the same time sympathetic. Dorrie must be kept happy and amused, as well as being instructed."

"I'll do my best," said Miss Kimmidge meekly.

She felt rather depressed, and the "post" which had seemed, on her arrival and before it, cheerfully simple, grew formidable. As she went upstairs, she classed Mrs. Bonham as rather a trying old thing.

CHAPTER VIII

By the next morning, however, Miss Kimmidge had recovered. For one thing, the sun was shining, and as one of the windows in her bedroom looked east, it came streaming in upon her; and for another she had slept beautifully and felt fresh and energetic. Then her bath was deliciously hot, and she was so hungry for her breakfast as to lose all nervousness while she ate it. She and Dorrie breakfasted downstairs with Mrs. Bonham, and breakfast, when Miss Kimmidge went to bed, had loomed before her as an ordeal. When she got up, the ordeal looked less alarming, and when she actually faced it, it proved to be no ordeal at all. She began to think that Mrs. Bonham was rather a nice old thing after all.

Georgina was, indeed, very gracious. She had been pleased with Miss Kimmidge on the previous evening, in spite of the one or two little indiscretions of which she had been guilty. She felt that Miss Kimmidge "meant well," and also was likely to be tractable. Other candidates had, to be sure, meant well, but they

had had drawbacks of manner, appearance, accent or capacity. Of Miss Kimmidge's capacity she could not yet judge, but her appearance pleased her, her manner was simple and her accent was satisfactory. Georgina decided that she was sufficiently eligible to be submitted to the judgment of Rayke ; or rather, she decided, that if Miss Kimmidge went on well between now—Tuesday—and Thursday, she would ask Rayke to come and inspect her on Friday. Miss Kimmidge, unconscious of Mrs. Bonham's deliberations and decision, continued to enjoy the coffee, which was always excellent at the Beeches, and had been very poor in the Kimmidge household, and finished up her breakfast with rolls and marmalade.

" I don't want Dorrie to work more than three hours a day," said Georgina ; " two in the morning and one in the afternoon."

" It's quite enough for her age," agreed Miss Kimmidge.

" Do you like lessons ? " she asked of Dorrie.

" No," said Dorrie. " Do you ? "

Miss Kimmidge found the question difficult. She really did not like either learning or teaching, but how could a governess say so ?

" Some," she answered. " Geography, for instance."

" I don't know it," said Dorrie doubtfully.

" You learn it with maps."

" Like what's in the hall ? "

" She means the county map," explained Georgina.

" Yes, darling, something like that."

" Oh," was all Dorrie said.

She was not so communicative as she had been a year ago : she had become, since completing her seventh year, shyer and more self-conscious, the least

little bit more difficult to manage. Georgina noticed the change and wondered secretly if it had anything to do with the cessation of Nurse. Miss Kimmidge naturally observed no change, since she had not known Dorrie before, but she knew, as the eldest of a large family, that children were apt to change after seven and that the eighth and ninth years were sometimes difficult ones. That Dorrie would not be hard to manage she felt sure; the child could not, she told herself, be anything but a duck; but she was prepared to find in the duck patches of reserve and possibly caprices. One child, however, was a mere nothing after the seven brothers and sisters she had had to deal with, and she started off to the schoolroom with a light heart.

It grew no heavier as the day went on. Dorrie was charming; she became red in the face and damp in the hand with the excitement of drawing a map of England, and laughed over the multiplication table. The map was taken down at lunch-time to show Mrs. Bonham, and although Mrs. Bonham had no idea it was meant for England, she was delighted with it. For the smoking governess had wearied Dorrie with sums, and the anti-vivisectionist had bored her with verbs, and each and all had given her the idea that lessons were horrid. Georgina suspended judgment till tea-time, but having entered the schoolroom while the schoolroom tea was going on, having assured herself that Dorrie was still happy, that Miss Kimmidge's hair was still tidy and that Hannah was not in surreptitious attendance, she waited no longer. She wrote to Rayke immediately her own tea was over and asked him to come on Friday afternoon.

CHAPTER IX

ON Thursday Cook made a currant and sultana cake, and on Friday Rayke came to tea. Georgina had felt a little self-conscious vexation in ordering the cake; she had a sense that Cook would know for whom it was ordered. Cook did know, but she also, besides anticipating Rayke's visit, guessed at its purport.

"She'll be 'aving 'im," said Cook, "to see what 'e thinks of this 'ere Miss Gummidge."

It was thus that Miss Kimmidge's name was rendered in the kitchen, and Miss Gummidge she continued to be as long as to Mrs. Bonham she was Miss Kimmidge, to Dorrie—except on state occasions—Kimmy or Pat-a-cake, to Hannah Miss Patricia. For Hannah had been much taken with Miss Kimmidge's Christian name; she thought it lovely; and when she added anything to the "Miss" by which she usually addressed Miss Kimmidge, it was Patricia that she added. She hoped very ardently that Miss Patricia would "do," and this long before she arrived at the use of the Christian name; for without spoken words Hannah and Miss Kimmidge understood one another, without definite compact they speedily made a working agreement.

Dorrie, for instance, was often in Miss Kimmidge's room when Miss Kimmidge changed her dress, looking at and playing with various possessions of Miss Kimmidge's which were chiefly interesting because they did not belong to Dorrie, so that the handling of them was in the nature of a privilege and a treat; and when Hannah brought in hot water, she was apt to stay for a few minutes, beginning by answering questions or

remarks addressed to her by Miss Kimmidge and ending by talking to Dorrie. It did not come within the scope of what Mrs. Bonham considered necessary attendance that Miss Kimmidge should be supplied with hot water, save in the morning and—perhaps—at night; there was the hot-water tap in the housemaid's cupboard at the end of the passage, and Miss Kimmidge could fetch hot water if she required it. But Hannah had begun by bringing hot water on any and every occasion when hot water might be acceptable, and Miss Kimmidge had begun by allowing an illicit, though limited intercourse between Hannah and Dorrie: and as they had begun they went on.

It cannot be said that Miss Kimmidge encouraged the intercourse; rather, she winked at it; and even while she to some extent restricted it, her attitude towards the intercourse and towards Hannah was, as Hannah was aware, sympathetic. She never said to Hannah: "I know how you feel and I'll do what I can for you, but you see I've got to do my job for Mrs. Bonham"; nor did Hannah reply in words: "All right, Miss, and thank you kindly"; but unspoken such a dialogue may be said to have passed between them; and while Miss Kimmidge on her side did what she could, Hannah on her side never urged her to do what she couldn't.

Georgina, enjoying a sweetbread and claret in the dining-room, did not know that Hannah, each evening, added to Miss Kimmidge's tucking up of Dorrie, a tucking up of her own; and why should Miss Kimmidge mention it? Hannah had tucked up Dorrie before Miss Kimmidge's arrival, and Miss Kimmidge simply let it go on. If it was to be mentioned at all Dorrie was the one to mention it, but Dorrie, from some

instinctive sense of prudence, never spoke to her mother of Hannah's evening visits and good-night kiss.

At the time of Miss Kimmidge's inspection by Dr. Rayke, the tacit understanding between her and Hannah was only tentative, not established : it found expression in Miss Kimmidge's enquiries on the subject of Hannah's attacks of toothache and Hannah's answers to the effect that her teeth were quite easy, or that she had had to have " another bottle " : but that an understanding as to an ache far worse than that of any tooth would ultimately be established Hannah was inclined to hope, if only Miss Kimmidge " did " ! Hannah therefore awaited Rayke's visit with trepidation, for she, as well as Cook, divined its main purpose.

CHAPTER X

DR. RAYKE arrived with his customary punctuality. He came at twenty minutes past four, and tea, as everybody knew who knew Mrs. Bonham, was at four-thirty. So that Janet was able to let him in and announce him before setting out the tea-table, and could concentrate her mind upon the tray and its contents without the disturbing consideration that she might not hear Dr. Rayke's ring.

Always while Janet went in and out of the drawing-room, Georgina and Rayke enquired after each other's health and let off the remarks about the weather which were an essential preliminary to conversation. Then came tea, leisurely partaken of; about half-way through, the introduction of the matter specially

to be considered, if such matter there were ; and after tea the serious consultation, the asking for and giving of advice. But if no knotty point was to be debated—and this was frequently the case—Mrs. Bonham and Dr. Rayke discussed, not the problems peculiar to Mrs. Bonham, but the problems of their neighbours. They did not gossip ; *that* would have been beneath the dignity of both ; and they prefaced report or criticism with qualifying remarks, such as : " I hear, but of course there may be no truth in it . . ." " I don't want to judge, but I cannot help thinking . . ." Nevertheless, they did, in a devious and restrained way, arrive at repeating to each other most of the scandal of the neighbourhood ; not indeed with maliciousness, but with that vicarious enjoyment of others' failings which is all that is permitted to the respectable. They could not themselves do the things they deprecated, but in regard to certain of them it was rather exciting to know that they were done.

But on this occasion, the occasion awaited in anxiety by Hannah, the proceedings were not as the proceedings of ordinary days. Miss Kimmidge and Dorrie were bidden to tea in the drawing-room.

They were not there when Rayke arrived, and the usual interchange of enquiries and remarks had free play. But when all the shining silver was on the table, and the hot scones and the currant buns, the thin bread-and-butter and the sultana cake, Mrs. Bonham said to Janet : " Will you tell them in the schoolroom that tea is ready."

To Rayke, who had been enlightened as to the object of the visit in the note of invitation, she said, waiting of course till Janet had gone : " I thought it would be the best way for you to judge what she is like. If she

came down afterwards, or you went up to the school-room, it wouldn't be the same thing."

"Quite so," said Rayke. "You have hit, as usual, upon the best way of doing the thing."

They smiled at each other. Rayke was thinking that women—in their place—were very satisfactory: Georgina was thinking what a delightful friend Rayke was and how often she agreed with him.

Meanwhile the unconscious Miss Kimmidge had put on her blue skirt and the white silk blouse, which was still perfectly fresh, and, waiting in the schoolroom, was very glad of the summons to the drawing-room. For Miss Kimmidge was hungry, and her chief feeling as she and Dorrie went downstairs was satisfaction at the prospect of having her tea. She had not, unlike Hannah and the cook, discerned the tea-party's esoteric significance; and her sole doubt as she entered the drawing-room was the doubt whether she would be able to eat as much as she wanted. The schoolroom bread-and-butter was substantially thick; here (she cast an eye on it ere she was introduced to Rayke) it was genteelly thin.

"Dr. Rayke—Miss Kimmidge. Miss Kimmidge has come to take charge of Dorrie. Dr. Rayke," said Mrs. Bonham to Miss Kimmidge, in impressive tones, "is my valued adviser and friend."

Miss Kimmidge bowed; comment from a nursery governess upon the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Bonham's valued friend was impossible.

She sat down upon the chair indicated by Georgina, while Dorrie was kissed by Uncle Rayke. Dorrie did not much like Rayke's embraces because he had a beard which tickled her face, but she submitted to them, since, as she had already told Miss Kimmidge,

"I have to. Mummy says it would hurt his feelings if I didn't, and it doesn't exactly hurt my face, only makes me want to rub it."

She gave it now a little surreptitious rub on the way to her seat by Miss Kimmidge. She hoped Uncle Rayke didn't notice, and he didn't. If he had, it would not have occurred to him to connect the rubbing with his kiss. But he was, in fact, engaged in observing Miss Kimmidge.

She struck him as being what he described to himself as likely. She was evidently not nervous or highly strung: Rayke did not like extra-sensitive people. No signs of hysteria: he was inclined to think most women hysterical. Nor did she look clever: he objected to clever women. Intelligence was all very well, and capability, but anything more was tiresome. Georgina Bonham was his idea of a capable, intelligent woman.

Having formed a preliminary impression he turned his attention to Georgina and the tea-table. Presently he would engage Miss Kimmidge in conversation.

Miss Kimmidge, meanwhile, having noted his courtesy to herself and his evident affection for Dorrie, classed him provisionally as a decent old thing. Then she also switched off her attention. Miss Kimmidge's attention was given to Dorrie's tea and her own.

They began with bread-and-butter, and it was, as she had already noted, distressingly thin. A slice was nowhere; if you took a real bite it was gone in two twos, and if you tried to make it last you just had to nibble. Miss Kimmidge could not voice these drawbacks, but Dorrie did.

"In this bread-and-butter, the bread isn't any thicker than the butter, is it, Mummy?" she said.

"I like best when it is thicker. Don't you, Miss Kimmidge? like we have upstairs."

"The schoolroom bread-and-butter is best for hungry people like you and me, I think," returned Miss Kimmidge.

"Certainly not hysterical," commented Rayke to himself.

"Perhaps the scones would suit you better," said Mrs. Bonham. "Dr. Rayke, would you be so kind as to put the scones near Dorrie and Miss Kimmidge?"

Dr. Rayke did so, "with pleasure," as he said. Miss Kimmidge, with greater pleasure, took advantage of their proximity, and got on much better than, from the bread-and-butter beginning, she had dared to hope. She finished up with a slice of the sultana cake. Rayke cut it for her, and it was a large slice. She was confirmed in her opinion that he was a decent old thing.

And then, while she ate the final mouthfuls, Rayke began the testing of her character and attainments by what he called engaging her in conversation.

CHAPTER XI

"I SUPPOSE," said Rayke, "you have a bent for teaching—a sort of natural inclination that way."

Miss Kimmidge shook her head.

"I doubt it," she replied.

"Ah?" said Rayke. "But—er, then—er, why—er?"

"I had to do *something*," Miss Kimmidge said. "And what else *can* you do?—if you're a woman."

"Very true." Rayke nodded his head slowly. He

thought the reply, if not altogether satisfactory, implied a becoming sense of limitation.

"There's the post office," suggested Georgina lamely, "and the telegraph service and—er, all that, for girls who have no leaning towards domesticity."

"Oh, but for all those things you have to pass an examination, and I *couldn't*, I know. You can't," said Miss Kimmidge, turning to Rayke, "pass examinations unless you're specially trained or coached, can you?"

"Certainly not," agreed Rayke. The simplicity of her attitude appealed to him. "No votes or anything of that sort about her," he reflected.

"But teachers, governesses," he went on, "nowadays, if they want to rise in the profession, are expected——"

Miss Kimmidge made bold to interrupt him. "Oh yes, I know, degrees and things. But I never could. That's why I go in for being a *nursery* governess. You don't have to be a B.A. or anything for that."

"A love of children," said Georgina, "is the essential—or *an* essential."

"Yes," agreed Miss Kimmidge, "but fortunately you don't have to pass examinations in order to like children." Again she turned to Rayke. "Do you?" she said with a smile.

"Rather not; it's part of the nature of women—old-fashioned women at any rate. All the same"—Rayke addressed Georgina—"love of children is not sufficient in itself to make a teacher."

"I said *an* essential," corrected Georgina. "Of course nobody can teach without having been educated."

"And Miss Kimmidge of course has been educated,"

said Rayke. He answered Georgina, but he looked at Miss Kimmidge: the look was an enquiry.

"Oh, I know the usual things, of course," she answered.

"I wonder what you mean by the usual things?"

Georgina beckoned to Dorrie.

"Fetch the animal book from the table, darling, and we'll look at the pictures."

When Dorrie came back with the book, Georgina, opening it, looked across at Rayke.

"Have your cigarette, Doctor, pray. Miss Kimmidge won't mind, I'm sure."

"What could I say if I did?" thought Miss Kimmidge. What she actually did say was: "Oh no."

"You're sure?" Rayke paused, with cigarette poised in air.

"Quite," Miss Kimmidge smiled.

Dr. Rayke lighted the cigarette and took a puff or two at it; then:

"Let me see," he said, "you were saying that—er—you—"

"I was saying I had been taught the usual things, and you were saying you wondered what I meant by the usual things."

"Yes, that was it, yes. Well, what do you mean?"

"Oh, arithmetic; no algebra or Euclid or anything of that kind, you know, but just the rules and some fractions. And then geography and composition and music—but I'm not musical. And French—but I can't speak it. I know the grammar though, the conjugations and all that."

"I see," said Rayke. He nodded his head slowly, as much as to say, "That's good enough." "History,"

he went on, "is a very wide subject." His look questioned: "How much do you know of that?"

"*Very*," said Miss Kimmidge, "and rather confusing—I mean remembering what was going on in all the different countries at the same time." She lowered her voice a trifle. "I confess, too, I never quite got the hang of the Holy Roman Empire."

Nor had Rayke, and he felt that the Holy Roman Empire did not very much matter. What did matter was that Miss Kimmidge should say "got the hang of." Rayke felt that it would not do, or rather that Mrs. Bonham would feel it would not do. Personally he passed the expression—under the gaze of Miss Kimmidge; but Mrs. Bonham—! Miss Kimmidge's trusting gaze, not to speak of the confidential lowering of her voice, would have no effect upon Mrs. Bonham. And Mrs. Bonham disapproved of slang. So did the doctor—in a young woman. But this young woman—so he was convinced—meant no harm, and the slang, if it actually was slang, was of a mild kind. Only Mrs. Bonham . . .

He glanced at her. Had she overheard? No, the lowered voice and the animal book had prevented that. But he must give Miss Kimmidge a hint.

"And composition? I think you said composition. English, chiefly, I suppose?"

"English altogether. I *couldn't* compose in French. Could you?"

"No, I never learnt French; no, I couldn't. But then you see I'm not—not——"

"Not a nursery governess," said Miss Kimmidge, and laughed.

It was hardly a laugh, just a smile with a sound in it; nevertheless Georgina heard it and looked up from

the animal book; first at Miss Kimmidge, who continued to smile, and then at Rayke, who slightly nodded. The nod told her that he was successfully testing Miss Kimmidge, and Georgina turned her attention again to Dorrie and a giraffe.

"English composition is most important," said Rayke. "It helps people not only to write but to speak their own language properly."

"I suppose so," said Miss Kimmidge.

"It discourages"—Rayke blew out a puff of smoke—"or ought to discourage, the use of slang."

"Yes," said Miss Kimmidge: it was rather a doubtful yes.

"And slang is one of the deformities of modern speech."

"I see," said Miss Kimmidge.

"It doesn't matter so much," Rayke went on, "in a man. But in a woman it's—er——"

He hesitated, seeking an adequate adjective, while Miss Kimmidge thought: "*Have* I said . . . What have I said?"

"Deplorable," ended Rayke, and Miss Kimmidge thought: "I must have."

Georgina closed the book.

"There, darling, that's the end. And now, perhaps you and Miss Kimmidge would like to go upstairs again."

Rayke opened the door for them; Rayke shook hands with Miss Kimmidge and kissed Dorrie; and on the way upstairs Dorrie rubbed her face—furtively, and Miss Kimmidge tried to remember everything she had said while in the drawing-room. She had not said very much at all. What *could* it be? Near the top she exclaimed: "I have it."

"What?" asked Dorrie.

"Something I was trying to remember." To herself she added: "It must have been that—the hang of it. What a funny old thing!"

CHAPTER XII

MEANWHILE, in the drawing-room, Georgina, as Rayke came towards her from the door, said: "Well?"

"I think," said Rayke with a slow air of deliberation, "that she'll do."

"She seems—er—sensible?"

"I think so. No fads or views or hysterical fancies."

"And she looks nice—neat, I mean. I don't call her pretty."

"Not exactly so, no. But not the reverse. Quite nice-looking enough."

"For her position, yes. And she keeps her hair tidy. I confess I do like well-dressed hair."

Rayke glanced at Georgina's smooth coils. He gave the slightest of bows.

"Obviously," he said.

Georgina smiled. "I always think it's a sign of character; orderliness and—and sense," she proceeded.

"I'm sure it is," said Rayke.

Georgina paused.

"You don't think——" she began; and then Janet came in to clear away the tea, and conversation became concerned with the garden.

When all traces of tea had gone and the door was shut, the garden was suddenly abandoned.

"You were saying?" said Rayke.

"I was saying—what was I saying?" asked Georgina; but she knew quite well. "Oh yes, I was going to ask you whether you thought Miss Kimmidge was the least little bit—I don't know how to put it—forward—familiar—a *trifle* too much at her ease?"

Rayke appeared to consider the matter judicially.

"I know what you mean," he said; and he did; it was the laugh. Rayke had not objected to the laugh, and Miss Kimmidge had nice white even teeth and looked almost—well, quite pretty when she laughed. But Georgina, he knew, just and often liberal in her methods, had strict views on the deportment of dependents. He would serve both her and Miss Kimmidge best by a judicial indifference.

"Yes, I know what you mean," he repeated after a pondering pause, "but I don't think it means anything. I think you told me it was her first situation——"

"Yes."

"And she's young——"

"Twenty."

"And I think it's just—well, what you might call amateurishness. She hasn't quite got the hang" (Rayke realized suddenly that he was using the expression he had rebuked Miss Kimmidge for using) "of the position."

Georgina did not even wince at the expression when employed by Rayke.

"You think that's all?" she said.

"I *think* so, I don't think you'll find much to complain of in that direction. I fancy," Rayke added with an air of detachment, "that she has been well brought up."

"Her references said so, and I'm glad your observa-

tion bears them out. But is there any other direction in which you think she might *not* be satisfactory ? "

Rayke paused, then shook his head.

" No, I think on the whole—— Her scholastic attainments I don't suppose are specially high, but then you didn't want that."

" No. What I want is a superior, refined person to look after Dorrie and teach her the beginnings ; somebody who speaks properly, with a good accent and ladylike expressions."

" Miss Kimmidge seems to speak all right. But *that* you could tell of course as soon as she arrived."

" Yes, at once. Oh yes, her way of speaking's all right. And I don't think she's slangy."

" I hope not," said Rayke. To himself he added : " I don't think she will be after my hint."

" You know how I dislike slang."

" Yes."

" In a woman. A slang expression by a man now and again is—well, different."

" You always discriminate," said Rayke.

He got up and held out his hand.

" Well, you'll let me know how she goes on."

" Of course. But I *hope*, after what you've told me, that she'll do. Your opinion rather jumps with mine."

" It very often does," said Rayke, smiling.

" And thank you *so* much."

" I don't know what for. The thanks should be——"

" You *know* what a help your opinion is to me," Georgina interrupted.

She went with Rayke to the front door and let him out. She was full of graciousness because she was full

of hope. It really seemed as if Miss Kimmidge would do ! And if she did ! Oh, the relief !

Cook in the kitchen said : " I wonder what his verdict is ? "

Hannah in the housemaid's cupboard, drawing hot water for Miss Kimmidge, hoped fervently that " he'd took to her."

Arriving with the hot water in Miss Kimmidge's room, she ventured an enquiry as to whether Miss Kimmidge had got on well with the Doctor.

" Oh yes," said Miss Kimmidge carelessly. " He seems a kindly old gentleman."

Kindly ! He hadn't been stand-off then. It looked well. Hannah hoped for the best.

CHAPTER XIII

MISS KIMMIDGE spoke carelessly to Hannah ; but she was aware that she had been weighed and judged. Going down to tea in the drawing-room, she had had no expectation of being put into a scale, but when Mrs. Bonham asked for the animal book, and she was left practically *tête-à-tête* with Dr. Rayke, she became conscious that Mrs. Bonham's valued adviser and friend was there for the purpose of valuing and advising on *her*. She was not, as the Doctor had perceived, particularly sensitive or highly strung, neither was she specially endowed with intuition ; but she had shrewdness and observation, as well as high spirits and a healthy vitality ; moreover, it did not require unusual capacity to realize that Rayke was, as she termed it, pumping her.

She thought, reflecting in her own room, that the scales had dipped on the right side. To be sure she had made a slip, but she had carried the balance nevertheless ; and, having shrewdness and observation, she had also the tact which proceeds from the combination of those qualities, and the capacity to profit by Rayke's not too subtle hint.

Mrs. Bonham did not like slang, even of the mildest brew. Well, she would guard the door of her lips so that no slang came forth either when she was talking to Mrs. Bonham or to Dorrie. Alone with Hannah—sometimes—she might, perhaps, permit herself the relief of expressions not recognized in the Rayke-Bonham code ; for Hannah, being a dear old thing, and subject moreover to lapses in grammar and aitches, presumably would not mind. Otherwise, as far as in her lay, she would fall in with Mrs. Bonham's wishes and prejudices. She *ought* to, seeing that she was paid money for that purpose, and also she wanted to stay on. Dorrie was a dear, and if you *had* to go out and take a situation, she didn't suppose you would easily find a pleasanter one. The bedroom was most comfortable ; more comfortable a good deal than her bedroom at home ; not that *that* was important ; still, it counted. Then Hannah was a dear old thing ; Mrs. Bonham, she was beginning to think, was quite a nice old thing ; and Dorrie—Miss Kimmidge quite understood why Hannah had not wanted to give up Dorrie. So she did her best to do, and it came about that she did do ; aided by the deficiencies of her precursors, by Rayke's approval and by Dorrie's decidedly taking to her.

The news of Miss Kimmidge's arrival and probable success was soon made known to the Needlework Guild, and thence was spread throughout the town. Dear

Mrs. Bonham had at last got a nursery governess who seemed as if she would do. Dear Mrs. Bonham's nursery governess was doing. Dear Mrs. Bonham's nursery governess *did*. How wise of Mrs. Bonham to make the change! She was no longer "poor," nor was her wisdom questioned. Miss Kimmidge had saved her reputation.

Miss Truefitt, when it was definitely established that Mrs. Bonham was suited, remarked that she had been a precious long time about it; but that was Miss Truefitt all over; and who was she to criticize? The critics who had at one time been inclined to side with her, now joined in the popular approval of Mrs. Bonham's policy. For Mrs. Bonham had sailed successfully into harbour, and Miss Truefitt's suggestions of submarine disasters and eventual torpedoing had come to nought. Mrs. Bonham's sagacity was vindicated and Miss Truefitt's was squashed by the failure of her own prognostications.

Meanwhile Miss Kimmidge, her appearance, her attainments, her past, her present and her future, were freely discussed.

She had never been "out" before.

Yes, she had: she had been two years with a friend of Mrs. Bonham's. That was how Mrs. Bonham heard of her. Mrs. Ansell knew it for a fact.

But Miss Pitt knew, also as a fact, that she had come straight from home.

Miss Pottlebury had been informed that Miss Kimmidge had taught in a High School for eighteen months and that her forte was mathematics: whereas Mrs. Markham had it, on the best authority, that her one deficiency was in the direction of figures.

Miss Pottlebury gave way. She had never quite

recovered from the sheep and was disposed to allow that she *might* have been misinformed.

Mrs. Ansell remarked that she did not pretend to know anything about Miss Kimmidge as a teacher ; she went by what she saw ; and she thought Miss Kimmidge had nice blue eyes.

Blue? Miss Truefitt was amazed that anybody should say that Miss Kimmidge's eyes were blue. They were brown.

Miss Truefitt, on this point, received popular support ; it was carried that Miss Kimmidge's eyes were brown ; but not, as Miss Truefitt also averred, that she had a snub nose. The nose was, some declared, aquiline, others said straight.

"Grecian," suggested Miss Truefitt with a sniff.

Then Miss Kimmidge was tall, she was short, she was fat, she was thin, she was sallow of skin, she had a radiant complexion.

"But I saw her in church."

"I, also, can see when I am in church."

"I saw her coming out and was quite close to her."

"But *I* was just behind her coming in, and the top of her hat came no higher than my nose."

Miss Kimmidge was to stay a year.

No, two.

No, five.

Miss Kimmidge was to prepare her pupil for a High School.

No, she wasn't ; she was to take her abroad to learn French and German.

Not at all ; Dorrie was never to leave home. *That* Mrs. Ansell knew for a *fact*.

"Well, *I* heard——" began Miss Pitt.

And then came a chorus of contradictory facts, all of which could be vouched for.

Interest reached its apex when Mrs. Bonham announced at one Guild Meeting that Miss Kimmidge would attend the next.

CHAPTER XIV

Miss Kimmidge, putting on her hat preparatory to attending the Guild Meeting, tilted it ever so little on one side. It was a concession to a sense of revolt against impending propriety, for Miss Kimmidge had an idea that in the matter of propriety the Needlework Guild would be something in the nature of an apotheosis. She had not wanted to go to the Needlework Guild, and she might have got out of it; her going was really an act of self-sacrifice, and the swing of the pendulum incited in her a desire for self-assertion. Ever since her arrival in Stottleham she had worn her hat perfectly straight; a straightly placed hat seemed to be demanded by the spirit of the place. To-day she tilted it; not sufficiently to appear rakish, but to the point of being slightly provocative.

Miss Kimmidge, standing, as it were, on the brink of the Needlework Guild, had had in her own hands the alternatives of drawing back or of plunging in. Because of Hannah she had chosen to plunge in. For on that afternoon Dorrie had been asked to tea at the Saunders-Parrs', and Dorrie of course had to be taken to Layfield Lodge and brought back again. As to the fetching there was no difficulty; Miss Kimmidge could call for her after the Guild Meeting; it was as to the

going that the rub arose. For if Miss Kimmidge went to the Guild Meeting, it would devolve upon Hannah to take Dorrie to Layfield Lodge, and would it be too much encouragement . . . ? Georgina was divided between her unwillingness to encourage the relations between Hannah and Dorrie and her need of Miss Kimmidge's services, for the Guild season was nearly at an end and work was rather in arrears owing to the marriage of one member and the illness of another. Moreover, there was in the back of her mind a half-avowed desire to present to a section of Stottleham her presentable nursery governess with the tidy hair.

In this dilemma she had consulted Miss Kimmidge.

"We badly need help—at the Knickerbockers; but if you come . . . There's Dorrie, you see. She's not asked till a quarter to four."

It was then that Hannah, with a hot-water can and hungry eyes, arose on the surface of Miss Kimmidge's inner vision.

"Couldn't Hannah . . . ?" she said tentatively.

"I'd thought of that. But you know what I told you. I don't want to encourage her, or indeed Dorrie, to be together."

"No, of course not." Now was Miss Kimmidge's chance to get out of the Guild Meeting: she had but to put a spoke in Hannah's wheel and smash it went and the Guild Meeting with it. On the other hand Hannah . . . really a dear old thing and rather a pitiful old thing, turned for half an hour into a delighted old thing!

"But still," she added, "once in a way . . ." and shook her head wisely, as though to say, "*That* could do no harm."

And Mrs. Bonham succumbed to the suggestion; it

jumped with her own wishes, and she decided in favour of the Guild Meeting, the extra hands and the tidy head.

So now Miss Kimmidge, having put on her hat and buttoned her gloves, awaited Mrs. Bonham in the hall. And presently Mrs. Bonham rustled down. She usually rustled as she moved, but in the rustlings a discriminating ear could detect differences in degree and kind. There was the domestic rustle, prominent especially in summer and more especially in the morning, suggestive of starch. There was the smart silken rustle of society functions. And there was the subdued rustle of church, meetings and the Needlework Guild. To-day the rustle came softly down the stairs, and Mrs. Bonham, in clothes of tempered elegance, arrived in the hall. She cast at Miss Kimmidge a critical glance.

"Excuse me, Miss Kimmidge," she said. "Your hat's a little crooked."

"Oh!" said Miss Kimmidge. She added: "I'm sorry."

And she had been so glad!

She went to the glass over the umbrella stand, and arranged her hat *à la* Stottleham, then turned to Mrs. Bonham.

"Is that all right?"

"Perfectly. I have never seen your hat the least bit crooked before," said Mrs. Bonham as they set out.

"No?" said Miss Kimmidge.

Side by side they walked down the High Street, each with a perfectly straight hat. In Mrs. Bonham's hat was a waving plume; in Miss Kimmidge's a cock's feather.

CHAPTER XV

THE members of the Needlework Guild were on the tiptoe of expectation. They were almost on tiptoe of their several feet, as Mrs. Bonham, followed by Miss Kimmidge, entered the room. Every neck was craned, every eye focussed. How tall was she really? Supposing her eyes should be blue after all? And what about her complexion?

She was *not* tall, barely middle height. Miss Pitt had been right then; she *would* about come up to the bridge of Miss Pitt's nose. When she came near, you saw that there was no more blue in her eyes than there was in an acorn, that they were brown, *of course*. As to her complexion, everybody was disappointed. It was not sallow nor was it radiant; it was just an ordinary, healthy, quite nice complexion, such as you might see any day in Stottleham.

On the whole Miss Kimmidge was rather disappointing; she was a trifle too ordinary; there was nothing to rave about, for or against. Nevertheless the Petticoats, the Nightgowns and the Chemises were somewhat envious of the Knickerbockers, for to the Knickerbocker table it was that Miss Kimmidge was destined, and you cannot really tell what a person is like unless you enter into conversation with that person.

The Knickerbockers, however, did not gather very much from Miss Kimmidge's conversation. Miss Kimmidge was demure; she was sparing of remark and concentrated her attention on her work. In truth she found it dull, quite as dull as she had expected;

the straightening of her hat had damped down the little feeling of insubordination and she felt herself altogether subordinate; nay, worse, a subordinate, wholly and completely a nursery governess. It was not exhilarating.

Then, by and bye, as she gave no indication of horrifying vices or extraordinary views, the Knickerbockers began to look upon her as what she herself felt herself to be—Mrs. Bonham's nursery governess, who suited Mrs. Bonham. Such an aspect diminished the interest in her. The interest, indeed, had been immensely heightened by her predecessors. Had the first nursery governess "done," she would soon have been done with as far as the curiosity of the various layers of Stottleham society was concerned; it was the number, the variety, the vices and the views of the procession which had passed through Mrs. Bonham's schoolroom that had raised a cumulative interest in nursery governesses as a species. If Miss Kimmidge proved neither violent nor vicious, peculiar nor perverse, there would be nothing to differentiate her from the known inhabitants of the known world, and her position would have to be determined, not by her capacity for evoking horror, but by her social status. And they all, from the highest to the lowest, knew what *that* was. Mrs. Bonham was a social pillar, and stood majestic on a base as broad as that of society itself. But Mrs. Bonham's nursery governess had next to no base; she was, as it were, but a ballet dancer on the social stage, with no wider or more solid social standing than was to be gained by pirouetting on the toes of a single foot.

Nevertheless, they observed Miss Kimmidge with lurking expectation; for who could tell what dramatic

surprise might not leap forth from her lips, or issue in unwonted action? They questioned her, one by one, and all listened to her answers, longing—with a longing to themselves unconfessed—for anarchic utterances which never came. Miss Kimmidge appeared to go regularly to church; she smoked no cigarettes, walked in no processions, stood up for no rights, animal or feminine, and seemed convinced that Britannia should rule the waves.

The nearest thing to a thrill came when Miss Pottlebury questioned her upon the subject of working-parties. Had she been accustomed to attend them?

"No," said Miss Kimmidge, "she had never been to one before."

This looked more promising.

"How was that?" Mrs. Markham made haste to enquire.

"I had no time for any sewing when I lived at home, except the mending," answered Miss Kimmidge. "You see there were all the boys' socks and pants and breeches."

Was it quite seemly to mention such articles? Pants? and especially breeches? The Knickerbockers pricked up their ears: so did the workers at the other tables, for Miss Kimmidge, when she got as far as breeches, was on the verge of a sneeze, and the word came out with a gasp on a rather high note.

Breeches! What *could* the nursery governess be talking about? Perhaps, after all, she was fast. The Chemises, the Nightgowns and the Petticoats harboured a secret excitement: goodness only knew what Rabelasian tendencies were hidden beneath a respectable exterior: there was a possibility that Miss Kimmidge might shock them after all.

At Miss Kimmidge's own table, however, such an illusion did not persist. It was obvious that she spoke in innocence, not in indelicacy. If the breeches even had been men's breeches. But they were only boys', and those boys her brothers. It might be that she was not fastidious, but there was nothing *wrong*. It only amounted to this—that dear Mrs. Bonham's nursery governess was not, in refinement, altogether on the level of dear Mrs. Bonham. But, then, what could you expect?

CHAPTER XVI

If Miss Kimmidge had known what was expected of her, she might have been tempted to rise to the occasion. But she did not know, and it did not occur to her imagination that the sober atmosphere of the Needlework Guild would have been agreeably stirred by a breath of scandal. She had been brought to do her bit and she did it. When it was done, she awaited further orders from Mrs. Bonham.

Now the Guild Meeting was over at four-thirty, and Dorrie was to be fetched at five-thirty; there was therefore an hour before Miss Kimmidge could fetch her. She had supposed that she would return to the Beeches and have tea before setting out for Layfield Lodge: but here came in a little plot arranged by Mrs. Vearing with her dear Mrs. Bonham.

Dr. Rayke having passed judgment on Miss Kimmidge, it was arranged that Mrs. Vearing should now take stock of her; and what occasion could be more opportune than the one now presented? So when the

work was over and Miss Kimmidge came to await further directions, Mrs. Bonham introduced her to Mrs. Vearing and Mrs. Vearing said :

" I am hoping you will come with me to the Vicarage. It is nearer the Lodge than the Beeches, and I should be so pleased to give you a cup of tea and have a chat till it is time for you to go for darling Dorrie."

Miss Kimmidge looked at Mrs. Bonham, and Mrs. Bonham smiled and murmured : " Most kind, I'm sure " : upon which Miss Kimmidge replied that she should be delighted.

So when the work was all put away, she accompanied Mrs. Vearing. She had taken rather a fancy to Mrs. Vearing, and Mrs. Vearing, on her side, was favourably impressed by Miss Kimmidge.

" A little too stiff about the hair and hat," she was thinking, " to be quite artistic, but dear Mrs. Bonham, I know, puts neatness before æstheticism."

Did Miss Kimmidge divine her thoughts ? or was it the effect of Mrs. Vearing's front hair arranged *à coup de vent* ? Anyhow, this is what happened. Arrived in the Vicarage drawing-room, Mrs. Vearing threw off her hat and veil, displaying the careless waves which surmounted her forehead.

" Would you like to take off—— Oh, you haven't a veil, I see," she said to Miss Kimmidge.

" No," said Miss Kimmidge, " but I will just see if my hat's all right, if you'll allow me."

" Of course." Mrs. Vearing waved her hand towards the mantelpiece. " There's a mirror. . . ."

Miss Kimmidge went over to the mirror, and, raising her hands to her head, tilted the straight-setting hat a little to one side—a little more to one side than she had originally placed it at the Beeches.

Mrs. Vearing noticed the change; her glance as Miss Kimmidge returned to her chair was a note of interrogation; and Miss Kimmidge was conscious of the glance.

"Some people's hats," she said, "are meant to be worn straight and go crooked, and some are meant to be a little on one side and go straight."

There was a touch of apology in her voice, a touch of deprecation in her eyes.

"Mrs. Bonham, I think," said Mrs. Vearing, "likes rather a—a formal way of wearing hats."

"Of course," said Miss Kimmidge, still with the deprecating eyes, "I should always wear my hat as Mrs. Bonham wished—when with Mrs. Bonham; or indeed with Dorrie."

Mrs. Vearing smiled; the reply pleased her. It betokened, she thought, a becoming deference to the opinions of dear Mrs. Bonham, with, at the same time, a leaning towards her own artistic proclivities. The smile encouraged Miss Kimmidge.

"When I'm on my own . . ." she proceeded, and stopped, partly because it was difficult to put into words what she had in her mind, and partly because she was fearful that she had, in her own parlance, "said a slang."

But Mrs. Vearing was so little versed in slang that she did not even recognize it when she met it, and she had a secret sympathy with the angle of Miss Kimmidge's hat.

"It looks very nice as it is, my dear," she said; and Miss Kimmidge instantly defined her as a *sweet* old thing.

"I think," Mrs. Vearing went on, "that you have never been away from home before?"

"Never," said Miss Kimmidge. She added, Mrs.

Vearing being a sweet, sympathetic old thing: "It was rather a wrench."

"I am sure it must have been." Mrs. Vearing's tone was condoling, but she went on with cheerful utterance: "But you could not be more delightfully placed, could not have a happier home than with dear Mrs. Bonham."

"I suppose not. And Dorrie is a duck."

It seemed safe to say duck to Mrs. Vearing, and it proved to be safe.

Mrs. Vearing responded: "A duck of ducks."

"You know Hannah, of course," said Miss Kimmidge.

"Oh yes, poor Hannah!" Mrs. Vearing's tone was that of the gravedigger apostrophizing poor Yorick; then again she was uplifted on the wings of cheerfulness. "But Mrs. Bonham has been charmingly kind to her. Instead of sending her away, as she *might* have done——"

Mrs. Vearing paused, and Miss Kimmidge said: "Quite so."

"As she *might* have done, as most people *would* have done, she offered to keep her on as housemaid."

"Very kind," said Miss Kimmidge.

"*Generous*. I was very glad about it, for poor Hannah is devoted to Dorrie; it would have broken her heart to leave her. And between ourselves I think Dorrie . . ."

Mrs. Vearing suddenly pulled up: she felt that she was treading on delicate, not to say dangerous, possibly even disloyal ground.

"How do you like my chintz?" she asked.

"I think it's sweet. I wanted to say so as soon as I came in, but didn't like to."

Mrs. Vearing smiled, and this time it was not a limited smile, as when she had smiled over the hat, but full and broad—a *café complet* as compared with a *café simple*. For Miss Kimmidge had assailed her sympathy at a vulnerable point. Stottleham, if it did not dislike, did not appreciate Mrs. Vearing's chintzes, and Mrs. Vearing, in the matter of chintzes, fancied herself. Even dear Mrs. Bonham's opinion in respect of chair-covers she did not regard as equal to her own.

Georgina certainly had a soberer taste, and she was more orderly than enterprising; her chair-covers were better made and of a more ordinary pattern than Mrs. Vearing's. She eyed Mrs. Vearing's exuberances, not exactly askance, but with an eye unlighted by admiration. But Miss Kimmidge—Mrs. Vearing had hopes of Miss Kimmidge. She would probably appreciate the effect of white muslin curtains against the glowing colours of the chintz, and the additional daintiness of the frills: she would probably, also, really *like* sitting in the arbour and enjoy having tea in it. Mrs. Vearing made up her mind that later on, when the weather was a little warmer, she would invite Miss Kimmidge to spend the afternoon and they would have tea in the garden.

CHAPTER XVII

THE Vicar, coming in at tea-time, received the impression that Miss Kimmidge was rather a jaunty young person; and as a matter of fact she was, that afternoon, with the Vicar, just a thought jaunty. The hat was really at the bottom of it, but the Vicar did not know this; neither did Miss Kimmidge. Mr. Vearing

was incapable of noting the angle at which a hat was poised, and had it been pointed out to him, he would not have realized the angle's significance; and Miss Kimmidge, on her side, was unaware how far the altering of the angle had altered her mood. But it had, in fact, removed the sense of repression, and Mrs. Vearing's words and smiles had assisted in raising the little reactionary wave of elation on which she was now lifted. She felt more like Pat and less like Miss Kimmidge than she had felt since her arrival at Stottleham.

Therefore she smiled at the Vicar; then, when the Vicar said that he wanted somehow to call her Miss Cribbage instead of Miss Kimmidge, she laughed; and, as Dr. Rayke had observed, she looked her best when she laughed. The mere laugh, apart from what she looked like, appealed to the Vicar, for most people did not like jokes about their names. Mr. Vearing had an awful memory of a pun in which Bone-'em occurred, and upon which he had ventured in the expectation of amusing Alicia's dearest friend. The amusement had not come off, and afterwards Alicia . . . Since that day he had refrained from witticisms of the kind, but there was something about Miss Kimmidge that aroused what he himself called—and surely one may joke about one's *own* name—the old Adam.

So that when Miss Kimmidge laughed because her name reminded Mr. Vearing of cribbage, Mr. Vearing was agreeably impressed by her capacity for seeing a joke. He did not, of course, know that it was the very poorness of the joke which was the chief cause of her laughter, did not know that she thought it so funny of him to think it funny.

So the tea-party was a great success; so great that

Mrs. Vearing was impelled to sit down and write a testimonial to Miss Kimmidge's satisfactoriness for Miss Kimmidge to take back to Mrs. Bonham.

"You will excuse me," she said, "if I write a note. There is a little matter about which I have to send information to Mrs. Bonham, and if you will take it by hand, it will save time and postage."

This was Mrs. Vearing's artfulness, for Miss Kimmidge was not to dream that the note was about herself, and Mrs. Vearing as she went to her bureau plumed herself on her diplomacy; for she had not even prevaricated, and yet Miss Kimmidge—nobody, could possibly guess what was the purport of the note.

Miss Kimmidge certainly did not; she did not even try; she went on talking to the Vicar and listening to him and laughing, while Mrs. Vearing wrote her note.

"MY DEAR MRS. BONHAM,

"I am sending you a hasty line to tell you that Adam and I are both most favourably impressed by Miss Kimmidge, and feel sure that she will do. Not *over* intellectual, I should say, but with——"

She was about to write "artistic leanings," but paused and substituted "a simple straightforward nature."

"a simple straightforward nature, the kind of person you would desire—and we would all desire—to be the companion of darling Dorrie. Details I will keep till we meet, but I cannot refrain from giving you *at once* this outline of our *first impressions*."

"As always, dear Mrs. Bonham,

"Your affectionate friend,

"A. V."

Miss Kimmidge took the note and departed for Layfield Lodge. She paused on her way thither before a shop window and once more altered the angle of her hat ; no longer jaunty, she was able immediately upon her arrival at the Beeches to take Mrs. Vearing's note to Mrs. Bonham.

Georgina read the note with satisfaction. She had more respect for Mrs. Vearing's first impressions than for her maturer judgment ; and the Vicar, though she did not attach much weight to his opinion—except on religious subjects—did not as a rule take to people who were not *nice*.

" Did you have a pleasant visit at the Vicarage ? " Georgina asked, refolding the note.

" Oh, very. They were both *charming* to me."

" Mrs. Vearing is most kind and gentle, and the Vicar is so thoroughly conscientious."

" Yes," said Miss Kimmidge.

" And most earnest in the pulpit."

Georgina preferred the Vicar in the pulpit to the Vicar at large : she would have liked—though had the idea been put into words she would have scouted it with horror—but she would really have liked to keep him there, only letting him out, as it were, for air and exercise. She regarded him, to some extent, as a horse, admirable in harness and quiet in the stable, but not wholly subject to control when put out to grass. At large she never quite knew where to have him, whereas in his proper place he was all that her fancy, as a pillar of society, painted a pillar of the church.

BOOK III
MISS KIMMIDGE

CHAPTER I

For the next seven years all went well at the Beeches and in Stottleham. To be sure there were minor misfortunes, such as domestic difficulties with unprofitable servants, from which few households were exempt; and there were bereavements.

Of these Georgina Bonham had her share, in the death of a brother-in-law in India and of an aunt at Cheltenham. She bore the losses with a calm fortitude which Stottleham designated Christian. Miss Kimmidge had a fleeting, secret notion that the calmness and the fortitude might be partly due to the facts that Mrs. Bonham had not seen the brother-in-law for fifteen years and that the aunt left her five thousand pounds; but she hardly breathed it to herself, much less to Stottleham. Georgina herself, in agreement with Stottleham, ascribed her composure to Christianity.

In the case of the aunt she put off a garden party without even a murmur at the expense and inconvenience incurred; and her mourning on both occasions was, as all Stottleham agreed, in the best of taste; not overdone, but with no grudging in outlay; just like dear Mrs. Bonham.

By the time of the second death, that of the aunt, which occurred four years after Miss Kimmidge's arrival, Miss Kimmidge had become a Stottleham institution. She was firmly established at the Beeches, and therefore established in Stottleham. And she was no longer Mrs. Bonham's nursery governess who might possibly do, who did positively do; she was that nice Miss Kimmidge; and that nice Miss Kimmidge was as fully accepted—though of course in a different way—as was dear Mrs. Bonham herself.

Her success was owing partly to her tact, and partly to her simplicity. Tactful she was and shrewd, but with no capacity for double-dealing; the fact that she wore her hat straight when in the company of Dorrie and her mother and tilted it when she went out to tea without them was the extent of her duplicity; and while she did not act the dragon to Hannah, neither did she fail towards Mrs. Bonham in the character of watch-dog. So that those who at first were disposed to designate her deep eventually termed her transparent; and perhaps she was no more one than the other.

But in the rearing of her reputation she had had perilous moments, and one of these—it lasted between a fortnight and three weeks—occurred not long after her arrival.

The peril was in the form of Dr. Rayke.

Rayke had thought that Miss Kimmidge looked nice when she laughed, and it occurred to him that he would like to see her laugh again. Experience confirmed his first impression, and, on the pretext to himself and Georgina that it was desirable to test Miss Kimmidge by dropping in upon her unawares, he paid frequent visits to the schoolroom, and found

as a result that Miss Kimmidge, who certainly did look very nice when she laughed, looked also rather nice when she didn't.

It cannot be said that Rayke ever seriously contemplated the idea of installing Miss Kimmidge in the place which Mrs. Bonham, unknown to himself, had already declined. It may be that dreams may have arisen within him and that he recognized them as merely dreams; it may be that he did not dream at all, but that, finding Miss Kimmidge pleasant to look upon, he just let himself drift; such things have been known, even in methodically minded gentlemen of fifty. Anyhow, it came to pass that one day, finding Miss Kimmidge alone in the garden, Rayke made eyes at her.

There could be no doubt as to what he was making. Miss Kimmidge had no doubt, and her shrewdness at once perceived the salient points in the situation. The most obvious one was that Rayke was a silly old thing; the most important was that Mrs. Bonham would be deeply annoyed—chiefly with Miss Kimmidge; the one that demanded immediate attention was the putting out of the eyes that Rayke was making.

So when Rayke, languishing, said: "I suppose you look upon me as quite old," Miss Kimmidge, instead of responding with the denial he expected, replied: "Oh, but I don't *mind* people being old, you know, so long as they have their faculties; and you still *have*."

It put an end to the peril. Rayke, though Miss Kimmidge laughed as she spoke, did not think she looked nice as she did it; he thought indeed she looked horrid.

From that moment he ceased to test her; Mrs. Bonham, he told himself, must look after her own governess. For Miss Kimmidge had re-become no more and no less than the nursery governess at the Beeches, and very soon he forgot that he had ever looked upon her as anything else.

CHAPTER II

THE garden party which had been put off in June took place in September, and the day chosen for it was Dorrie's birthday. Because it was Dorrie's birthday, there was a children's party which went on side by side with the grown-up party, and a special bit of the garden, with a special tea-table, was set apart for Dorrie and her friends.

People liked Mrs. Bonham's parties, because everything was so nicely done. Georgina, when she entertained, was not obtrusively lavish, but she was generously adequate. There was plenty of champagne cup and claret cup, and both were excellently brewed. That was Rayke's department. Georgina and Rayke both considered that anything to do with alcohol was man's province and beyond the discrimination of woman's palate; and although Georgina really had a correct taste in the matter of claret, hock, champagne and port, and a subtle appreciation of liqueurs, she always consulted Rayke on the contents of her cellar, and handed over to him the whole responsibility of garden-party beverages; those, that is to say, in which alcohol played a part.

The lemonade, the tea, and the coffee, both iced and hot, were, she considered, entirely within the sphere

of feminine capacity, as also the whole of the food, and there could be no doubt that achievement supported her theory. Everybody said that there was no hostess in the town, or indeed the neighbourhood, who provided such nice teas as dear Mrs. Bonham; such delicious fruit, such dainty cakes, such a variety of sandwiches.

The everybody who came to the garden party did not of course mean the everybody of Stottleham at large. Miss Pottlebury, for instance, and Mrs. Markham and many others were only invited to the Beeches when the entertainment had a philanthropic, a religious or a political flavour: but at every entertainment, however mixed, the food and drink were excellent, and most people of respectability in Stottleham had had an opportunity of testing not only Mrs. Bonham's cakes, tea and coffee, but also her ices, even her claret cup. The champagne cup was purely social.

At Dorrie's table under the beech tree, there was no cup of any kind, but there were peaches and grapes and there were also ices. Miss Kimmidge had been told to keep an eye on the ices, lest the guests should too flagrantly court indigestion; but the eye that Miss Kimmidge kept, winked even as it winked at the tenderness of Hannah. She did exercise a certain controlling supervision, but she could not be a dragon all the time; intermittently she was next door to a confederate, and the amount of strawberry-cream ice which disappeared under the beech tree was out of all proportion to the number of the guests. But then, as Miss Kimmidge explained afterwards to Mrs. Bonham, there were many guests who did not properly belong to Dorrie's party and yet partook of refreshments under Dorrie's tree. There was, for instance,

Pat Saunders-Parr, who was twenty-one, and his sister, who was eighteen; whereas Dorrie's only real guest in the family was Gwendolen, who was twelve. And besides the Saunders-Parrs there was their cousin, Len Fortescue, a boy of sixteen, and various other people who had no business to eat ices at Dorrie's table.

Dorrie, at the party, had long black legs and short white skirts and a Panama hat, and Len Fortescue said she was the prettiest kid he had seen for a long time. She enjoyed herself immensely—except when Len pretended to choke over a peach and made her almost sick with fear; and everybody complimented dear Mrs. Bonham upon her charming little girl.

Georgina herself was radiant. She knew that in her carefully selected black and white and her new London hat she was looking her best, and she knew that Rayke eyed her with approval. She had not realized Rayke's lapse in the direction of Miss Kimmidge; it had been too short-lived and too little encouraged by Miss Kimmidge to be overt to Georgina's perception: but she did realize that on this afternoon Rayke was subject to a recrudescence of the livelier phase of his devotion to herself; and the realization was pleasant. It was agreeable to be considered desirable even though the desire were unpractical: agreeable too that the confidential friend should behold the admiration and deference accorded to her by friends not confidential. It showed him how many others there were who would be glad to step into his shoes and how careful he should be not to withdraw his feet. So Georgina, with a flush upon her face which was very becoming, and conscious that she was an all-round success, out-Bonhamed Mrs. Bonham in dear-ness, and thoroughly enjoyed herself.

Yet her chief satisfaction was not in her own success, but in the success of Dorrie: the position of Dorrie's mother meant more to her than even the position of Mrs. Bonham, who was in the best set in Stottleham, and not only that, but branched out in acquaintances beyond Stottleham into the surrounding county. And indeed the crown of Georgina's enjoyment of the party was that the enthusiasm of the county vied with the enthusiasm of Stottleham in admiration of Dorrie.

"What a charming child! Such a sweet little face. Aren't you proud of her?"

"She is pretty, I think." Georgina tried to make her voice judicial. "But then, you see . . . a mother's eyes . . ."

"But I assure you that no eyes could think her anything else. She's quite a picture."

Then a little further on it was:

"Your Dorrie is the belle of the party. Such a darling to look at and the dearest little manners."

Georgina went beaming on her way. She had a moment when she would have liked to take Dorrie in her arms and hug her, but she did not of course do anything of the kind; such an exhibition of affection would have been unseemly.

Under the beech tree, Hannah, serving out refreshments, also beamed. To feast her eyes upon Dorrie and to hear the comments made upon her was quite enough to transport Hannah to the seventh heaven; and in the seventh heaven she remained most of the afternoon, sacrificing an ice-plate and a teacup to the loftiness of her position. A duke—in a few years—certainly nothing less. But would even a duke . . . ? Royalty itself would hardly . . .

"Please will you give me another ice—the cream—for Miss Bonham!"

Down came Hannah from the seventh heaven to the ice-pail.

"She's had four, sir, and I don't know——"

"But she wants it—awfully, and they don't keep, you know. She can't have any to-morrow."

It was Len Fortescue who pleaded, and Len had pleading eyes as well as a pleading voice.

Hannah hesitated, and cast a beseeching glance at Dorrie. Dorrie understood the glance and came over to her.

"I'm not a bit sick, and they're lovely—Nurse."

She hardly ever called Hannah Nurse now, only on special occasions, if Hannah had a headache or a toothache or Dorrie a supreme desire. How could Hannah do anything but give in to her?

"You'll have one too," Dorrie said to Len.

"I don't know that I *can*."

"Oh, you must! A water one at any rate."

"All right, a water one."

"Cherry or lemon, sir?"

"Oh, cherry, won't you?" said Dorrie. "It's more delicious."

"Cherry, please."

The two retired, Len carrying both the plates, and sat down on a rug that was laid at the foot of the beech tree.

"If he'd have been a prince," thought Hannah, "I don't know but what . . ."

Something gripped her, inside, and strangled the thought. She did not want a concrete prince, and Len Fortescue was concrete: what she really wanted was that Dorrie should never grow up.

CHAPTER III

If Miss Kimmidge had been on the spot it is doubtful whether Dorrie would have eaten her fifth ice, but Miss Kimmidge, through no fault of her own, was not anywhere near the spot when Dorrie and Len began upon the strawberry cream and cherry water. She had been commissioned by Mrs. Bonham to fetch smelling salts for a lady—a county lady—who felt faint, and she did not return to the Leech tree till the ices had disappeared, and the plates had gone into the tub behind Hannah's table.

Nevertheless upon Miss Kimmidge's shoulders fell the blame of the indisposition which resulted from the ices.

"I told you to look after her," said Mrs. Bonham. "You know what children are."

"I did look after her as much as I could," Miss Kimmidge answered deprecatingly. "But I think it's partly the excitement."

Mrs. Bonham pondered. "Perhaps," she said. "Dorrie, of course, is very sensitive."

Dorrie, as a matter of fact, was neither more nor less sensitive than most children; in her nervous organization she was pretty well normal; but it was more in accord with Georgina's idea of her that she should suffer from emotional rather than stomachic disturbances. Even Rayke considered that what would have been hysterical in Miss Kimmidge was permissible and even interesting in Mrs. Bonham's only child; and when Mrs. Bonham consulted him—as a friend, for Rayke no longer practised—he adopted

Miss Kimmidge's suggestion, put forward to him by Georgina as her own.

Rayke came, as so often he came to the Beeches, in answer to a note sent by hand. The note on this occasion was not welcome. Rayke was busy with his botany, and was not at all eager to go and state the very obvious reason why Dorrie had been sick. He was inclined to swear and did in fact relieve his feelings by swearing: but he sent back a polite message to the effect that he would be at the Beeches in half an hour.

On his way his annoyance dissolved. He had a greater tenderness of feeling for Dorrie than he had ever had for anybody, save for the late Mrs. Rayke before he had married her; and the glamour of the garden party still hovered about the figure of Georgina. So that he arrived at the Beeches in a mood befitting the confidential and devoted friend.

Miss Kimmidge received him. Miss Kimmidge, who at the time of the eye-making had been carefully demure, was now deferentially casual. Rayke for her had become definitely and permanently a funny old thing; while he, on his side, had forgotten that he had ever looked at her through anything less prosaic than an eyeglass.

Mrs. Bonham, Miss Kimmidge informed him, was in Dorrie's room. Would he be so kind as to go up? Rayke went up.

Georgina, the flush of yesterday departed, was still illumined by the afterglow of success: she did not appear so attractive as she had appeared in the midst of her guests, but still, Rayke thought, she looked rather nice. Dorrie, in the whitest of white night-dresses and a little pale blue bed-jacket, was rather

enjoying herself. All sorts of toys and books were gathered around her, and Kimmy and Mummy were her devoted slaves: Hannah, moreover, while Mummy was at breakfast, had crept in and revelled in a quarter of an hour of slavery.

Rayke, having tested tongue and pulse, pronounced further doctoring unnecessary. Yes, no doubt she had been over-excited, and the excitement had helped to upset her digestion. Let her be kept quiet to-day and on a light diet, and she would be all right to-morrow. She could get up in the afternoon.

Georgina's chief care, after the verdict, was to know whether the diet should be confined to liquid food, or should it include chicken? Dorrie's anxiety was to know whether she might have lemonade. Mummy had only given her plain water, and when she had the measles she had had lemonade. And she knew there was a lot over from the party.

"I thought it might upset her again," said Georgina.
"I thought probably she had too much yesterday."

"But I didn't, Mummy; lemonade was what I *didn't* have."

Rayke pronounced in favour of the lemonade, thereby earning a fervent kiss from Dorrie, and also approval from Georgina, who always preferred that Dorrie's desires should be gratified rather than thwarted.

His visit completely did away with Georgina's slight anxiety and left her free to recall the many flattering incidents of the day before. It also completely restored to favour the censured Miss Kimmidge, who, initiating the theory of Dorrie's sensitiveness, had been proved a correct diagnostician.

CHAPTER IV

MISS KIMMIDGE was delighted to feel once more the sunshine of Mrs. Bonham's approval. Accepted by Stottleham, she had accepted, to a large extent, the Stottleham attitude and outlook; she too was disposed to regard Georgina as dear Mrs. Bonham. To be sure she still suffered from some of dear Mrs. Bonham's limitations—the very limitations which endeared Mrs. Bonham to Stottleham—; but Georgina's kindness and the generous comfort which pervaded her household appealed to Miss Kimmidge and built up in her loyalty and even affection.

As for the limitations, so long as you respected and did not attempt to combat them, everything was all right; so why not respect them? If Mrs. Bonham, in regard to Hannah, was not so generous in feeling as in food, it was better to attempt in no way to alter the feeling, but to make Hannah's path as smooth as might be. If, in connection with nursery governesses, Mrs. Bonham had ideas which could not be classed as broad, it was better in nowise to rebel against a narrowness which, as far as Miss Kimmidge was concerned, manifested itself only in ways which did not matter. If some of Mrs. Bonham's views were first cousins to prejudice, it was better to accept the relationship than to make any effort to sever it. Miss Kimmidge's ultimate conviction was that Mrs. Bonham was a kind and really a dear old thing, and in the depths of that conviction she buried all that was not wholly pleasant to contemplate.

It may be, too, that Mrs. Bonham came within the

influence of the spell which now for Miss Kimmidge beautified and beatified all Stottleham. Miss Pottlebury, innocent and ambitious, had from the beginning taken a fancy to Miss Kimmidge, had shown her little attentions, and on the first opportunity had asked her to tea. Miss Kimmidge, appreciating the kindness shown her, can hardly be said to have reciprocated the fancy; and certainly Miss Pottlebury's society was not of a nature to invest all Stottleham with charm. But Miss Pottlebury had a brother.

The brother did not appear at the first tea-party, nor the second, nor the third, nor indeed at all till Miss Kimmidge had been three years in Stottleham. Then he was transferred from the American branch of a business in New York to the English house in London, and then he came down to spend a week with Myra. Miss Pottlebury's name was Myra.

Miss Pottlebury's brother was not the least like Miss Pottlebury, except in a general, indeterminate way. He was tall, as was also Miss Pottlebury, and fair, and had eyes which, like hers, were more blue than anything else. But whereas Miss Pottlebury, whose clothes were of such good material that they always outlasted the fashions, looked undeniably dowdy, Ludovic looked definitely smart. His trousers had a crease down each leg and he had a predilection for spotless linen.

"He puts on a clean shirt every day," Miss Pottlebury confided to Miss Kimmidge. "Two, sometimes, if it's very hot."

"I like clean shirts," responded Miss Kimmidge. "It makes all the difference."

This was some time after Ludovic's advent, when Miss Kimmidge's interest in him had begun to be

lively." Previous to his appearance, she had been a little bored by Miss Pottlebury's tales of the brother who was twelve years younger than herself, and "the flower of the Pottlebury flock": but the tales ceased to pall when she became acquainted with the flower.

The first meeting took place on a Sunday afternoon.

"Dear Ludovic is coming on Saturday," Miss Pottlebury had said, "and you simply *must* come and meet him."

Miss Pottlebury, planning the introduction of friend to brother, was thrilled with excited expectation: Miss Kimmidge, expecting to meet a male Myra, was unthrilled and disposed towards boredom. Yet, having no reason for refusing the invitation, she accepted it.

CHAPTER V

Miss KIMMIDGE, setting out for Miss Pottlebury's on Sunday afternoon, had on her best coat and skirt; not because she had any intention or desire to impress Miss Pottlebury's brother, but because it was Sunday; and she stole out of the Beeches with her hat well down over her right ear simply and solely because Miss Pottlebury's was a house in which she could throw off what she called the Stottleham mask.

And when she got to Miss Pottlebury's, there—to repeat a joke of the Vicar's—instead of a male Myra, was an ad-mirer.

The joke was made long after, when Miss Kimmidge confided to the Vicar an account of her first interview with Ludovic, and when even Mrs. Vearing was able to laugh at it. At the beginning of Miss Kimmidge's interest in Ludovic, Mrs. Vearing viewed Ludovic with

antagonism, it being her pet plan at that time to bring about a romantic attachment between Miss Kimmidge and the curate of a neighbouring parish. The drawback to the plan was that neither the curate nor Miss Kimmidge, though on friendly terms, were stirred by feelings at all romantic; but nevertheless Mrs. Vearing resented the intrusion of Miss Pottlebury's brother, and for some time ignored the fact of his existence.

The result of Mrs. Vearing's lack of sympathy was that Miss Kimmidge, during the uncertain and exciting days of a courtship necessarily intermittent, since it could only be conducted during Ludovic's visits to Miss Pottlebury, avoided the Vicarage, where she had become Mrs. Vearing's nice little friend and laughter-in-ordinary to the Vicar; and in the ups and downs of these days she found her only confidante in Hannah.

"Hannah," Miss Kimmidge would say, "he's coming next Saturday for the week-end."

"You don't say so, Miss Patricia. I hope it'll be fine."

"I shall go, fine or not fine. Miss Pottlebury has invited me."

"It's your hat I'm thinking of, Miss."

"I shall wear the best, wet or fine, because he likes it. I know he does by the way he looked at it; you can tell, you know."

"I daresay, Miss Patricia."

Another time it was: "Hannah, he saw me home."

"Never, Miss."

"Yes, and what do you think?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Miss."

"He asked me to call him Ludovic."

Hannah, lively in interest but laconic in expression, could only repeat: "I never, Miss Patricia!"

"He did; and so of course—what else could I do? I asked him to call me Pat."

"And did he, Miss?"

"He wanted me to make it Patty, but I said I couldn't stand that, it reminded me too much of oysters. I always think of oysters and patties together, don't you?"

"I don't know that I do, Miss Patricia."

"And what do you think he said?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Miss Patricia. Perhaps that he'd like to eat you up."

"Oh no, Hannah, it was something about oysters and pearls—too silly really to tell you."

"They will talk silly, Miss, at times. My young man that died was just the same."

Sometimes Miss Kimmidge expressed herself in generalities. Hannah, with the hot-water can, would pause by the washstand while Miss Kimmidge voiced her views, and even when Hannah had toothache, she was ready to listen to Miss Kimmidge.

"Hannah, if I ever marry, it won't be satin."

"Not satin, Miss Patricia? But satin and a veil go lovely together."

"Yes, I know; but it's too rich and shiny for my style. I should like to be married in the summer and have something thin and floating, and a wreath of white roses."

"Not orange blossom, Miss Patricia?"

"No. It's correct, I know, but I always see myself in roses."

"I see Miss Dorrie in orange blossoms, Miss, and a

lace veil and satin so shiny you could see your face in it."

"Miss Dorrie's different, of course. She'd carry it off."

But Miss Kimmidge had her hours of depression, and then it would be:

"Hannah, I shall never marry."

"Oh, come, Miss," Hannah would say.

"I don't believe he really cares. He may just be flirting."

"Oh no, Miss, from what you tell me of how he carries on."

"Think of all the girls he must see in London, Hannah."

"I shouldn't think nothing about 'em if I was you, Miss."

"I feel sure I shall die an old maid."

"Not you, Miss."

"You don't *really* think so?"

"I do, Miss Patricia. I always seem to see you in a 'ome of your own."

No wonder that Miss Kimmidge in her hours of depression found Hannah not only a dear but also a comforting old thing.

CHAPTER VI

Mrs. KIMMIDGE's courtship had gone on for some time before its existence became known to Georgina. Her enlightenment came finally not through her own observation but through Mrs. Vearing.

Many people, to be sure, had hinted to dear Mrs. Bonham that that nice Miss Kimmidge was a great deal

at Miss Pottlebury's when Mr. Ludovic Pottlebury was at home; but Mrs. Bonham had not heeded the hints. She had not met Mr. Pottlebury; she did not frequent the society in which he was to be met; and it seemed to her highly improbable that the brother of a person so little attractive as Miss Pottlebury could have any attractions for Miss Kimmidge. Miss Kimmidge, perhaps, was amusing herself a little, and for a girl to amuse herself was, Georgina held, pardonably permissible, provided always that the amusement was moderate and conducted with discretion. And with Miss Pottlebury as chaperone . . . ! Georgina felt she could comfortably leave Miss Kimmidge to her amusement, especially as it evidently served to keep her bright, and it was desirable that Dorrie's nursery governess should not fail in brightness.

Mrs. Vearing, who, as the Vicar's wife, had met Mr. Pottlebury, had noted with jealous distress that his attractions, at any rate for Patricia (Mrs. Vearing had called Miss Kimmidge by her Christian name after a month's acquaintanceship), far outweighed the attractions of the curate; but for a long time she said nothing to Georgina. At first she did not wish to expose her own designs with regard to the curate; and then, resigning herself at last to their failure, she espoused what she called the cause of the lovers. Having espoused it, Mrs. Vearing was a little afraid lest dear Mrs. Bonham might not approve of the espousal. She felt herself to be something of a conspirator, and to conspire against dear Mrs. Bonham was almost an iniquity.

Nevertheless the position held a charm which she could not resist, and she continued to further the

courtship in all sorts of ways. Often did her conscience prick her, often in the presence of her friend did confusion arising from a sense of disloyalty overtake her; many a sleepless hour did she pass at night, wondering *what* dear Mrs. Bonham would say if she knew; many a time did she, as it were, confess herself to Adam and invite absolution.

Adam gave the absolution with careless promptitude, but with a tendency at the same time to present the case in a manner which Alicia felt to be almost brutal in its frankness.

"My dear Alicia, you can't possibly hunt both with the hare and the hounds. And the hound is quite able to look after herself, so don't bother."

It was rather dreadful to Mrs. Vearing to hear Mrs. Bonham called a hound, even in metaphor; but she would never be able to make Adam understand why it was dreadful, so she replied to the effect that what upset her was that she felt she had failed dear Mrs. Bonham in loyalty.

"Where in the name of fortune is the disloyalty to Mrs. Bonham in asking that nice little girl to meet her young man at tea? 'Tisn't as if Mrs. Bonham wanted him herself."

"Really, Adam, how you can even think . . . in connection with Mrs. Bonham . . ."

"You make one think all sorts of absurdities, my dear, by being so absurd yourself. Besides, you know you could never keep your finger out of a match-making pie."

Mrs. Vearing knew she could not, and subsided for a time, calmed by Adam's breezy indifference if not by his arguments; then, once more, conscience would urge her to discussion.

But at last there came a day when, to her inexpressible relief, she found her conduct not only condoned but justified, and more than justified, in the eyes of dear Mrs. Bonham.

CHAPTER VII

Miss Kimmidge, who had supplanted Nurse, acquired, in the course of time, Nurse's disabilities. Not that she had assumed the supremacy in Dorrie's world which had, though unadmitted by Georgina, been nevertheless the head and front of Nurse's offending: Miss Kimmidge, with Hannah constantly before her, was wise enough to run no risk of playing too prominent a part in her pupil's interest.

But there was one direction, in respect of which no amount of tact, discretion and niceness could prevent Miss Kimmidge's position from outgrowing Miss Kimmidge. Her accent, unlike Hannah's, was unassailable, her influence, unlike Hannah's, was limited; but her knowledge was limited as well as her influence, and her capacity as a teacher did not increase with what Mrs. Bonham called Dorrie's requirements. Mrs. Bonham, with some reluctance, acknowledged the fact, Rayke, with greater reluctance, and with the search which had preceded Miss Kimmidge vivid in his recollection, confirmed it. Dorrie, to be sure, was not particularly clever, not, indeed, clever at all, and neither Rayke nor Georgina wished her to be more than usually intelligent or more than usually well educated; their standard of usualness being the standard of Stottleham. But Miss Kimmidge was not even up to Stottleham.

"You couldn't expect it," said Georgina at a consultation tea, "in a nursery governess."

"You engaged her, if you remember," Rayke replied, "to take the place of Hannah. And to supplant Hannah—well, you didn't need so very much."

"She can't *speak* French at all, and the grammar isn't much good alone."

French was the one subject in regard to which Georgina's ambition outsoared the complacency of Stottleham. She wished Dorrie to be able to speak French because it would be so useful when she and her mother went abroad. Georgina, travelling with Dorrie's father, had realized that it was "nice" to be able to speak French.

"I can't speak French myself, and I have got on very well without it," Rayke said. "But it's different for a woman—quite a good thing."

"Her father spoke fluently."

There was that rare thing in Georgina's voice—rare when she spoke to Rayke—a touch of acerbity. Rayke hastened to offer an indirect apology.

"Ah, but he was exceptional in that way," he said. To himself he thought: "A philandering fellow like that *would* speak French."

"And I think a woman ought to be able to keep accounts," Georgina went on. "Household accounts, I mean—to be able to add up her books and all that sort of thing."

"Double entry?" laughed Rayke.

Mrs. Bonham ignored the laugh and the suggestion: she was not in a mood to be amused.

"Miss Kimmidge has an extraordinary way, in keeping her own accounts," she said, "of putting the

credit and debit on the same page. I can't think how she ever keeps them straight."

"I couldn't," said Rayke, "attempt to follow the evolutions of the ordinary feminine mind. But it's quite evident, my dear Mrs. Bonham, that you must make a change."

"I'm afraid so," Georgina sighed. "But it's most trying. It was bad enough with Hannah, but nothing to this."

"In some ways it seems to me not quite so difficult."

"In almost every way it's *more* difficult. You see I *wanted* to get rid of Nurse, but I don't want to get rid of Miss Kimmidge."

"Yes; of course."

"And I shall find it most unpleasant to tell her to go."

"You couldn't—might you not get Mrs. Vearing to break it to her? put the idea into her head?"

Georgina reflected. "I—I wonder."

"She goes a good deal to the Vicarage. Rather intimate there, isn't she?"

"Mrs. Vearing has been *most* kind, but I don't know that one could exactly call it an intimacy. Miss Kimmidge's real intimacy seems to be with Miss Pottlebury—which is extraordinary. What they can have in common . . . However, it's not my business."

"Miss Pottlebury has a brother."

"I believe she has. I've never seen him; he doesn't live at home, I think."

"No, but . . ."

Rayke stopped. He knew nothing about the Ludovic and Patricia romance, and his implied suggestion was based on general principles. If Georgina

was unaware that there was anything more than an acquaintance between Miss Kimmidge and Mr. Pottlebury, there probably was not anything; and it was evident that Georgina knew nothing.

"In any case," she said, "I couldn't take Miss Pottlebury into my confidence, or her brother. As for Mrs. Vearing . . ." Again she reflected.

"Well, think it over," Rayke said, getting up. "She might be able to oil the wheels."

CHAPTER VIII

GEORGINA, thinking over Rayke's suggestion, came to the conclusion that it was a good one; besides, it was in the natural sequence of things that, having consulted Dr. Rayke, she should proceed to unbosom herself to Mrs. Vearing; consultation with the one almost necessitated confidential conversation with the other. It was usual, too, that whereas the consultation took place at the Beeches the confidence was made at the Vicarage; and accordingly Mrs. Bonham wrote to Mrs. Vearing and "proposed herself" for tea and a talk.

Mrs. Vearing welcomed the proposal.

"My dear Mrs. Bonham," she wrote, "you know how delighted I *always* am to see you, and how charmed I am if my sympathy can give you any little aid in the many problems you have, as darling Dorrie's mother, to consider."

Georgina, in her note, had hinted that a difficulty in regard to Dorrie loomed on the horizon, and Mrs. Vearing was all agog to know what the difficulty could be. Could it, inquired intuition—or a guilty

conscience—be anything to do with Patricia and Ludovic? Had dear, dearest Mrs. Bonham found out that there was something between them and become troubled at the idea of losing Patricia? And did she suspect the part that Mrs. Vearing had played? Was she coming to reproach her?

Alicia was so torn and rent by the possibilities contingent upon Mrs. Bonham's visit, and so wrought upon Adam by her conjectures that Adam did the rarest thing in their world and turned upon her. He turned in a most unclergymanlike way and said why the dickens should Mrs. Bonham mind if little Patricia did marry? Mrs. Bonham wasn't the only person in the world. For all he cared and for all Alicia should care if she had an ounce of sense, Mrs. Bonham might go to . . . He pulled himself up and ended with "Nova Scotia."

It was dreadful to Mrs. Vearing to hear him, because she knew that Nova Scotia was a synonym and a concession to his cloth; and the idea of a breach between dear Mrs. Bonham and darling Adam was worse even than bearing the brunt of Mrs. Bonham's anger. The result was that she did her best to stroke down Adam, and that in the interval which elapsed between Adam's outburst and Mrs. Bonham's arrival she kept her fears to herself.

She strove to fortify her courage by telling herself that Adam was right. Why shouldn't Patricia marry? After all, she couldn't be Dorrie's nursery governess all her life; and men—well, she who will not when she may . . .

But Mrs. Vearing was very nervous all the same as she sat and waited for dear Mrs. Bonham. Her cheeks were flushed, and the *coup de vent* part of her

hair seemed to have had an extra *coup*. Adam, looking in upon his way to smoke a pipe in his study, thought she looked quite pretty and knew she was quite frightened, and went on his way with his heart full of Nova Scotia.

And as he banged the door of his study, Mrs. Bonham rang the front-door bell, and Mrs. Vearing, hearing both the bang and the bell, started from her chair and said: "Oh dear!"

CHAPTER IX

MRS. BONHAM sailed in smiling and gracious. She had quite decided that Rayke's way was the best way out of her difficulty, and that to Mrs. Vearing should be entrusted the disagreeable task of preparing Miss Kimmidge's mind for dismissal. Consequently she was as near to a supplicatory attitude as it was possible for Mrs. Bonham ever to be, and had Mrs. Vearing known of her friend's inner mood she would have breathed not only freely, but with gasps of joy and thankfulness. But Mrs. Vearing did not know, and reading into Mrs. Bonham's demeanour a condemnation of her own misdemeanour, she construed the ingratiating smile as one of triumphant detection.

"So pleased to see you," said Mrs. Vearing. "Will you take off anything—your coat? I daresay you've got warm walking; it's rather mild, isn't it, for October? But I had a fire because I know you are susceptible and don't like the damp. No more does Adam. And it is rather damp, though mild, as I said, for the time of year. Though walking, I daresay..."

Mrs. Vearing stumbled on in repetition till Georgina interrupted her.

"Thank you, I am not at all warm and should like to sit near the fire. How kind of you to have one!"

"Oh, not at all. This chair I think you like."

"Any chair," said Georgina. "All your chairs are comfortable."

"If she does it in a heaping coals of fire sort of way," thought Mrs. Vearing, "I shall cry, I know I shall."

She sat down opposite the fire and at right angles to Mrs. Bonham: it was better than meeting her gaze full face. She began nervously to talk about local topics. Had dear Mrs. Bonham heard that Mrs. Charles Marsden was laid up with bronchitis? Or of the quarrel between Miss Pitt and Mrs. Markham? Or that Miss Truefitt was going to have an aunt to live with her during the winter? She kept carefully away from Miss Pottlebury.

Mrs. Bonham knew about the bronchitis but not about the quarrel: she was obviously quite uninterested in Miss Truefitt's aunt. She was, in truth, somewhat irritated by Mrs. Vearing's prattle: she had come on a definite mission and it was tiresome to be confronted with the aunts and quarrels of inferior persons. She wanted to be as pleasant as possible, but she was not nervous as was Mrs. Vearing, and could not understand Mrs. Vearing's deprecating volubility. For one thing she was naturally more courageous than Alicia, and for another, it is less embarrassing to ask a person a favour than to be convicted of a crime; and to Alicia, face to face with Mrs. Bonham, the backing of Miss Kimmidge's romance appeared in the light of a crime.

"I have come," said Georgina, when lack of breath and news brought Mrs. Vearing to a pause, "to speak to you about something which is giving me a good deal of trouble."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Vearing.

"Which has been troubling me for some time past."

"Indeed?"

"The anxieties which weigh heaviest with me are, as you know, always connected with Dorrie."

"I do indeed," said Mrs. Vearing, "yes, indeed." To herself she said: "It is that."

"It's about Miss Kimmidge," Georgina went on.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Bonham," said Mrs. Vearing tremulously, "I knew it was."

Georgina smiled. "I am hardly surprised at your guessing."

"No, no," murmured Mrs. Vearing, "of course not."

"And it makes what I have come to say the easier."

"Pray say anything—everything—all you feel. I—I deserve it," Mrs. Vearing said in little gasps.

Georgina's glance held a certain disapproval. "I do wish she wouldn't be so emotional," she was thinking.

"You certainly do," she said aloud.

"I assure you . . ." Mrs. Vearing began, but Georgina went calmly on.

"You deserve my full confidence," she said, "and you shall have it—as always."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Vearing. "It is going to be coals of fire," she thought.

"I've been a good deal worried about Miss Kimmidge. Of course I like her very much; she is generally liked, I believe, in Stottleham."

"Oh yes; very much liked."

"She has proved a most suitable person," Georgina paused. "Hitherto," she added.

"She's young . . . you must remember . . . it's only natural . . ." said Mrs. Vearing.

"I am hardly surprised at your standing up for her; but I hope you will consider *my* position."

"Of course, of course, dear Mrs. Bonham. You ~~know~~ I would do that."

"I know she's young and I have made every allowance. But Dorrie, you see, is getting older every day."

"Dorrie?" said Mrs. Vearing.

"Yes, of course, Dorrie; you ~~know~~ she comes first. And of course she needs more."

"More?" said Mrs. Vearing, still in bewilderment.

"More, yes," said Georgina with impatience. "Of course she needs more. A nursery governess suitable for a child of seven is hardly up to a child of twelve. Surely you see that?"

"Oh yes, I—yes, of course I see. You mean then, dear Mrs. Bonham"—a sudden sunshine flooded the horizon of Mrs. Vearing's inner vision—"do you mean that you consider that Dorrie has outgrown Miss Kimmidge?"

"Certainly that is what I mean; just as she outgrew Nurse. And certainly I thought you would agree with me."

"Oh, I do," said Mrs. Vearing, "most sincerely I do."

"And that is what I came to talk to you about, to consult—confide—to—indeed to ask your help."

"Anything I can do . . ." said Mrs. Vearing. The sunshine was almost dazzling.

"I am in a very trying position," Georgina went

on. "The difficulty of getting rid of Miss Kimmidge, of telling her to go . . ."

"I don't know that you need find it so very difficult."

"You don't think she ought to be so very much upset? Of course if she were reasonable. . . . But you remember when Hannah had to stop being nurse . . . and really to hear people talk, you would think Miss Kimmidge was a fixture. Which is absurd."

"Quite absurd. But I doubt if Miss Kimmidge thinks so."

"Thinks it absurd? No, of course she wouldn't. That's what's so——"

"No, I mean that I doubt whether Miss Kimmidge considers herself a fixture."

"Really? You don't think—— Of course she *has* a good deal of common sense, but . . ."

Georgina paused, and Mrs. Vearing said nothing. She was longing to tell her news, but felt that she must not be too sudden: dear Mrs. Bonham did not like suddenness.

"You know her in a way better than I do," Georgina said presently, "more unofficially. You have been so very kind in having her here."

"Oh no. And she has been less here than at Miss Pottlebury's."

"Oh, Miss Pottlebury!" Georgina's tone waved Miss Pottlebury aside. "What I was going to say, to ask you indeed, as a personal favour, was whether you could manage to give Miss Kimmidge a hint—break it to her, before I say anything."

"Quite easily," said Mrs. Vearing.

"You really don't mind?" Georgina spoke in astonishment.

"Not at all. You see the Pottlebury situation . . ."

"Pottlebury? Whatever has Miss Pottlebury got to do with it? *She* has no children to educate."

"No, but she has a brother."

Rayke had made the same statement, but Georgina had passed it by: she could not pass it by as made by Mrs. Vearing.

"A brother! But Miss Pottlebury . . . a brother of Miss Pottlebury's must be a—a——"

"He is not," said Mrs. Vearing, "the least like Miss Pottlebury."

"You don't mean . . . ?"

"Yes, I do."

"But a brother of Miss Pottlebury's! He must be a . . . he can't be a . . ."

"I assure you he is quite presentable."

"You've seen him then?"

"Oh yes—often."

"I never have; I barely knew of his existence."

"As the Vicar's wife . . ." said Mrs. Vearing.

"Oh yes, of course. But I supposed he lived in London."

"He does, but he comes down pretty frequently."

"So *that* is the attraction at Miss Pottlebury's. And you say he's really presentable?"

"Quite; and *very* nice. I quite enjoy a chat with him, and so does Adam."

"Very odd that you never spoke of him before."

Mrs. Vearing coloured. "You see he met Miss Kimmidge here, and I didn't know—wasn't sure, dear Mrs. Bonham, whether you would approve."

"Approve? I? Whatever had it got to do with me?"

"I——" Mrs. Vearing's smile was tremulous. "I wasn't sure—I thought Miss Kimmidge suited you so well, and that you would be—*might* be—annoyed if she—deserted you."

"Annoyed? I am delighted." Georgina's face and voice testified to the genuineness of her speech.

"Oh, what a relief!" Mrs. Vearing's voice was shaky; she almost wept after all, though the cause of her emotion was far from what she had anticipated. "I was afraid you would think, in encouraging the courtship, I had played the part—had been disloyal to you."

"My dear friend!" said Mrs. Bonham, "you have done me one of the best turns you have ever done. I am most grateful to you."

During tea it was explained to Georgina that there was as yet no positive engagement; an understanding—of that Mrs. Vearing was sure, but nothing was settled. But that it soon would be settled she had no doubt.

"And now," she said, as Georgina rose to go, "I shall hurry it on."

"Do!" said Georgina.

At the door Mrs. Vearing, pressing Georgina's hand, said: "Dear Mrs. Bonham, you have made me so happy."

But Mrs. Bonham was to make her happier still. Smiling her most gracious smile she said:

"Ours has been a long and close friendship. Will you not call me Georgina?"

CHAPTER X

"Oh, Adam!"

Mrs. Vearing burst into the Vicar's study, flushed and tearful. The Vicar, struggling with the parable of the unjust steward, looked up from a manuscript chiefly consisting of deletions.

"My dear Alicia, what on earth is the matter?"

"Oh, Adam, she—she . . ."

"You didn't come to blows, I hope. Your hair . . ."

"Oh no," said Mrs. Vearing. "It's all right—perfectly right—more than right. And she—dear Mrs. Bonham—has asked me to call her Georgina."

"My word!" said the Vicar.

"Isn't it sweet of her?"

"As sugar," agreed the Vicar.

"Oh, Adam, don't laugh at me! You know . . ."

"Better laugh than cry—which you seem on the brink of doing."

Mrs. Vearing was indeed at that point of nervous tension where tears and laughter meet; it was touch and go which would triumph. She swallowed a sob and laughed.

"It's the reaction," she said, "the relief." She sat down by the Vicar's side. "To think we need never have worried at all!"

"I don't know that I did an immense amount of worrying—as regards Mrs. Bonham."

"Dear Georgina is delighted—simply delighted about Miss Kimmidge and Ludovic Pottlebury."

"So much the better for dear Georgina."

"And for me; and for Patricia. It's all worked out too delightfully well. If you would only stop

being sarcastic and show a little sympathy, I would tell you all about it."

"I'm full of sympathy; only my sermon . . . To-day's Friday, and I haven't a bit got the hang of it."

"Oh, preach an old one: nobody will remember. There's a fire in the drawing-room—a lovely fire."

The Vicar looked at his manuscript. There was little of what he had written that he had not scratched out, and the unjust steward bristled with difficulties.

"Any tea left?" he asked.

"Heaps—no, I don't know that there is, but I'll have some fresh made."

"May I smoke in the drawing-room?"

"Ye—yes." Adam was always nicer to talk to when he was smoking, Mrs. Vearing reflected. "Oh yes, certainly," she said.

So Adam, cosy by the drawing-room fire, stimulated by tea and soothed by his pipe, listened with full attention to Alicia's account of the turn things had taken. It was really much more interesting than his sermon, and he was moreover truly delighted that the course of Miss Kimmidge's love should cause no hitch between his wife and Mrs. Bonham.

Mrs. Bonham, meanwhile, had gone on her way rejoicing. She had always thought Miss Kimmidge nice; she thought her now nicer than ever. She did not say to herself in so many words that Miss Kimmidge had shown a becoming consideration by falling in love in the nick of time, but that was what she felt; and she arrived at the Beeches in a frame of mind which radiated peace to all men, and especially to Miss Kimmidge and Mr. Pottlebury. She was disposed to take Mr. Pottlebury at Mrs. Vearing's valua-

tion. Miss Kimmidge was so sensible that she would not be likely to make an unwise choice: and though Miss Pottlebury's brother was probably not attractive, no doubt he had solid qualities, and Miss Kimmidge was wise enough to base her affections on esteem rather than romance.

Meeting Miss Kimmidge in the hall, Mrs. Bonham smiled at her with supreme approbation. She had not smiled much at Miss Kimmidge for some time past. Disliking the task of dismissing her, disliking still more the task of telling Dorrie of the dismissal, she had vented her dislike in coldness to Miss Kimmidge. But now that it was Miss Kimmidge who was to take the initiative, "now," she might have said,

"is the winter of our discontent
Made sudden summer by this sun of"—Pottlebury.

Georgina's only part was to be gracious: she began at once to play it.

CHAPTER XI

Miss KIMMIDGE was pleased at her return to favour, but was not lifted by it to the apex of content. She had noted Mrs. Bonham's coldness, had been puzzled by it and a little disconcerted; but it had not positively depressed her. It had not occurred to her that Mrs. Bonham might be annoyed at her marrying, and had such an idea presented itself, she, unlike Mrs. Vearing, would not have been seriously disturbed. She liked Mrs. Bonham; very much; but not to the point of being upset by her disapproval where Ludovic was concerned. Only Ludovic, in that connection,

could upset her, only Ludovic could raise her to the heaven of happiness or depress her to the verge of despair: she was indeed so much absorbed by the thought of Ludovic, so rapt by hope or dulled by doubt, that she could not be deeply affected by a mere Mrs. Bonham.

And Ludovic, as she confided to Hannah, "had not spoken": the hub of her universe consisted in the question: Would he speak?

Hannah was still Miss Kimmidge's only confidante; the only one, that is to say, to whom her confidences were explicit. In Mrs. Vearing she confided only by hints, by unspoken admissions; in Miss Pottlebury, in intention, though not always in effect, not at all. But Hannah had always been a dear old thing, a simple old thing and a safe old thing; one who listened without giving advice, and whose sympathy was invariably tinctured with hope; and to Hannah, accordingly, Miss Kimmidge betrayed her doubts as well as her desires.

Hannah, deeply impressed by the trust reposed in her, and thrilled by the romance of the situation, preserved an unswerving loyalty and an unfailing interest. What she called true love was for Hannah a preponderating factor in life. Her own young man had died; but he had risen again to a certain extent in Miss Kimmidge's; and next to the romance she had dreamed of for Dorrie—a far-off next, but the only one allowed within measurable approach—her sympathy and hopes were centred on the romance of Miss Kimmidge.

So it was a great day for Hannah when, taking hot water as usual to Miss Patricia, she found Miss Patricia in a pink dressing-gown with cheeks to match, and eyes—to quote Hannah—flashing like diamonds.

"Oh, Hannah, what *do* you think?"

What Hannah thought was that he had spoken; but she was not going to say so. Supposing he hadn't? It was too great a risk. So pausing, can in hand, she said: "I'm sure I don't know, Miss."

"But guess, Hannah, guess!"

"I couldn't, Miss Patricia. I never was a hand at guessing."

"At last, at last—you know what I've been waiting for—hoping for. Oh, Hannah, surely . . ."

"You don't mean . . .?" Hannah paused.

"I do, of course I do. What else? He's spoken."

Hannah put down the can. "Never, Miss."

"I began to think," said Miss Kimmidge, laughing, "that it was going to be never. But it isn't; it's for ever and ever; and I'm so—I don't know whether to laugh or cry."

"I should laugh, Miss, if I was you."

"It was this afternoon. He's down, you know, for the week-end. He asked to see me home, and on the way he—he . . ."

"He told his love, I suppose, Miss Patricia."

"Yes, he did. And *such* love!"

"I never," said Hannah.

"I'm not worthy of it. I can't think——" Miss Kimmidge turned and looked in the glass.—"I'm sure I can't think what he sees in me."

"He sees his own true love, Miss, that's what he sees."

"But he thinks me *beautiful*, Hannah; and I know I'm not."

"Lovers carries beauty in their eyes, Miss Patricia. My young man was just the same, and Mother drilled it into me from a child that I wasn't nothing to look at."

"I don't care *what* I am, so long as *he* admires me."

"That's right, Miss."

"You haven't congratulated me, Hannah."

"I congratulate you, Miss Patricia, that I do."

"Thank you, ever so much. You've always been perfectly sweet, and helped me no end. I don't really know what I should have done without you."

"And Miss Dorrie, Miss? That's the only thing. She . . ."

"Oh, *that's* all right. I was to go in any case. Mrs. Vearing gave me the tip. Mrs. Bonham thinks she's getting beyond me."

"I suppose she'll keep on getting beyond—till *her* young——" Hannah paused, arrested by the limitations of language. Young man was an insult as applied to Dorrie's prince; gentleman was inadequate. "Till her fate comes along," she said. "It's the only one she won't get beyond."

As Hannah approached the door, Miss Kimmidge went after her.

"Do you know why he didn't speak before? A most extraordinary reason, but it shows his humility."

"I couldn't say, Miss."

"He was *afraid*—of *me*—afraid I didn't care."

"I never!" said Hannah.

She went out of the room and upstairs to her bedroom. She felt an attack of toothache beginning, and she wanted to apply some of the mixture which, years ago, had provided Mrs. Bonham with an additional excuse for changing her from Nurse to Hannah. But chiefly she wanted to be alone and think. Was there any further transformation in store for her? The ache in her tooth was as nothing to the ache at her heart, caused by such a possibility.

She felt she could not go downstairs again just yet. She was very glad for Miss Kimmidge, but she was miserable at the idea of further changes at the Beeches. What might it not mean? Yet, her thought ran on, so discreet had she been, so strictly had she schooled herself to be, outwardly at any rate, entirely housemaid and destitute of any trace of nurse, that she could not really believe there was any risk of her being sent away in the wake of Miss Kimmidge. Thus she comforted herself. Miss Dorrie might be sent to school; that was the worst that would happen. Bad; but not the worst that *might* happen; and there would be the holidays.

Her thoughts returned to Miss Patricia, and she was glad; then travelled back to her own young man, and she was sad; and then leapt forward to Dorrie's wooing and wedding. Toothache was forgotten as she saw Dorrie in the whitest and shiniest of satins, half covered with diamonds and with pearls, wreathed with flowers, dim behind the magnificence of her lace veil. She saw her with a prince at her feet, a palace as her home, a throne as her seat. And she saw herself in the palace with a feather brush and a duster, removing the last speck of dust from Dorrie's throne.

CHAPTER XII

MRS. BONHAM, everybody agreed, behaved with the utmost munificence in the matter of Miss Kimmidge's wedding present.

She gave her a silver tea service. Not plated, but silver, solid, real.

It was just like dear Mrs. Bonham, of course, to be

so generous, so lavish, yet Stottleham almost gasped at this latest demonstration of Mrs. Bonham's likeness to herself. Even Miss Truefitt was impressed, and received the news without a sniff. Who could sniff at a silver tea service? It was outside the category of things sniffable; it was a proof of dear Mrs. Bonham's dearness, costly, handsome, indisputable; Miss Truefitt bowed her head and added an appreciative murmur to the chorus of praise.

Miss Kimmidge herself was overwhelmed, or, as she expressed it to Hannah, dumbfounded. She had expected, when Mrs. Bonham had asked her if she would like some silver, perhaps a cream-jug or a pair of salt-cellars, at most a teapot, and that a small one. And the teapot was large—the Queen Anne pattern—and there was a cream-jug big enough for milk, and a sugar-basin; and a kettle!

"Adam," said Mrs. Vearing, "there's a kettle as well. Just fancy!"

"Isn't it usual," asked Adam, "to have a kettle?"

"Not unusual, but they're often given without. What I mean is, isn't it handsome of dear Georgina?"

"I suppose so," said Adam, and Mrs. Vearing called him cold.

"I hear," said Mrs. Markham to Miss Ansell, "that there's a kettle."

"Really? As well?"

"Yes. Wonderfully generous, isn't it?"

"It comes, I am informed—the tea service, I mean—from Bond Street," said Mrs. Pitt. "Mrs. Bonham went up to London for the day to choose it."

"Not for the day; she stayed all night," corrected Miss Ansell.

"Well, I was told that she came back by the 5.20."

"It was Regent Street, not Bond Street," said Mrs. Markham.

"I heard the Haymarket," said Miss Ansell.

"My informant," said Mrs. Pitt, "was Miss Pottlebury."

Miss Pottlebury, since the engagement, had gone up top of the second class in Stottleham; and Miss Pottlebury immensely enjoyed the position. She had always craved prominence, and now, as the sister of the man who was engaged to Mrs. Bonham's governess, she had a vogue which verged on notoriety. She stood, moreover, on the fringe of Mrs. Bonham's set. She had actually been to tea at the Beeches, not in connection with anything religious, but in company with her brother in a fashion purely social. She had not stood in the dining-room, cup in hand and jostled by co-workers of philanthropic intent: she had sat in the drawing-room, one of a circle so select as to include only herself, Ludovic, Patricia, dear Mrs. Bonham and her sweet little girl.

Miss Pottlebury referred casually but constantly to the episode.

"At Mrs. Bonham's the other day, we had a choice of China or Indian tea."

"When I was at Mrs. Bonham's lately . . ."

"We were discussing when I was at Mrs. Bonham's . . ."

And so on.

The rest of the class were filled with awe and envy, combined with a tendency to consider that Miss Pottlebury was putting on really too much side. Miss Truefitt, who had not found it in herself to sniff at the tea service, sniffed openly at the tea.

"What's a cup of tea?" she demanded. "It's not

life everlasting after all, and that's what anyone would suppose, to hear Miss Pottlebury."

The second class was not quite pleased with the tone of Miss Truefitt's criticism, but the condemnation of Miss Pottlebury's attitude found an echo in almost every heart. Besides, who knew? It was all very well to bridge the gulf which divided Mrs. Bonham's set from Miss Pottlebury's. The question was, was the bridge a fixed one or a drawbridge? If a drawbridge, would Mrs. Bonham, after the wedding, draw it? And if it were drawn, on which side of the gulf would Miss Pottlebury find herself?

"It doesn't do to crow before you've hatched your eggs," said Miss Ansell with acrimonious disregard of fowl-yard facts; but the personal application of her remark was accepted in the spirit in which it was offered. Miss Pottlebury, for the purposes of the argument, was accredited with bi-sexual behaviour, and it was agreed that she had crowed like a cock before she had hatched her eggs like a hen.

CHAPTER XIII

It was unfortunate that Miss Kimmidge's wedding could not take place at Stottleham, and Stottleham indeed was almost persuaded that it had, on that account, a grievance. Yet, on the other hand, Stottleham would have been shocked had the marriage been from any house but the house of Miss Kimmidge's mother. If only Mrs. Kimmidge could have removed from Brixley to Stottleham and satisfied both domestic convention and neighbourly interest, Stottleham would have touched the ideal. But the ideal was impracticable; Stottleham, with its usual good

sense, recognized that fact, and contented itself with the knowledge that Miss Kimmidge would be married in a fashion consonant with custom.

Georgina, for her part, had never even the inkling of a desire that Miss Kimmidge should be married anywhere but at Brixbury. She had no intention of going to Miss Kimmidge's wedding, and a hint, timorous and tentative on the part of Miss Kimmidge, as to Dorrie being a bridesmaid, was crushed before it could develop into a request. Mrs. Bonham was quite willing to give Miss Kimmidge a silver tea service, but that was a very different thing from going to her wedding; nor did Mrs. Bonham wish it to be said later on when Dorrie was grown up, that Miss Bonham had been bridesmaid to Mrs. Luuovic Pottlebury.

The distance from Brixbury was therefore convenient; it precluded the idea not only of Mrs. Bonham's presence at the wedding, but even of her being invited to it. Now Miss Kimmidge, emboldened by the tea service, *had* thought of inviting her; but when Mrs. Bonham put her foot down on the hint as to the bridesmaid—and Mrs. Bonham's foot was fairly flat—Miss Kimmidge was not slow to perceive that her gratitude for the wedding gift was expected to be diffident as well as effusive. So diffident she was; not flagrantly, but with the tact which had characterized her conduct ever since she had come to the Beeches. She let it be understood in Stottleham that she should not dream of inviting Mrs. Bonham. *Of course* she couldn't come such a distance! It would be ridiculous. And Stottleham agreed. Such a favour could not, in the circumstances, be expected of dear Mrs. Bonham.

But the Vearings went to the wedding. That, Georgina said, was all right; Mr. Vearing was a clergyman, so it didn't matter, and Mrs. Vearing, of course, was a clergyman's wife. It was different. Mr. Vearing took part in the wedding service; and Mrs. Vearing—in mauve—wiped her eyes with a lace handkerchief. She always wept at a wedding and always explained that her tears were tears of joy.

It was satin after all. When it came to the point, Patricia confessed to the triumphant Hannah that she could not resist it. And Ludovic's bridal present was a pearl pendant, so it was also pearls. She went away in blue, a soft blue and deep: Stottleham—not of course the leading set, but the rest of it—was shown a pattern of the cloth, and approved: and it was so sensible of that nice Miss Kimmidge to choose a colour and material which would be serviceable as a best dress all winter. Stottleham was not shown the white satin, because Mrs. Kimmidge could only afford one that was rather thin; but it looked lovely in the church, so Mrs. Vearing reported; and in the photograph of the bride and bridegroom which went the round, nobody could tell how thick were the folds of the bride's gown.

There were two bridesmaids, little Kimmidge sisters, dressed in white and pink. Mrs. Kimmidge wore black and white because she was a widow; and Miss Pottlebury was in dove colour.

All this was known and discussed in Stottleham, and generally approved; and it was considered very sensible, the month being November, that the bridesmaids' dresses were of serge and not muslin, especially as Eileen, the youngest child—so Mrs. Markham had heard—was subject to swollen glands. Miss Truefitt,

to be sure, could not forgo criticism: she said how anybody with Miss Pottlebury's complexion could go in for dove colour passed her. But Mrs. Vearing stated at the Needlework Guild that Miss Pottlebury looked very nice; and there was an anti-Truefitt faction which maintained that dove colour and Miss Pottlebury went quite well together.

The one blot on Miss Kimmidge's happiness was that her name was to be Pottlebury. She could not of course speak of it either to Ludovic or to Miss Pottlebury; and Hannah, to the last, remained her only confidante.

"I always thought that Patricia sounded rather absurd when it was followed even by Kimmidge. But Patricia Pottlebury! Don't you think, Hannah, that it's awful?"

"I'd be called Pottle, without the bury, Miss Patricia, if I loved 'im," said Hannah.

"Oh, of course. I'd be called *anything*. But if only they'd christened me Emma—or Kate, or—well, *any* sensible ordinary name."

"I wouldn't carry on about a name, Miss, if I was you. Patricia's a lovely name to my way of thinking. Besides," Hannah went on, "you can't have the man without the name."

"I know," said Miss Kimmidge, and sighed.

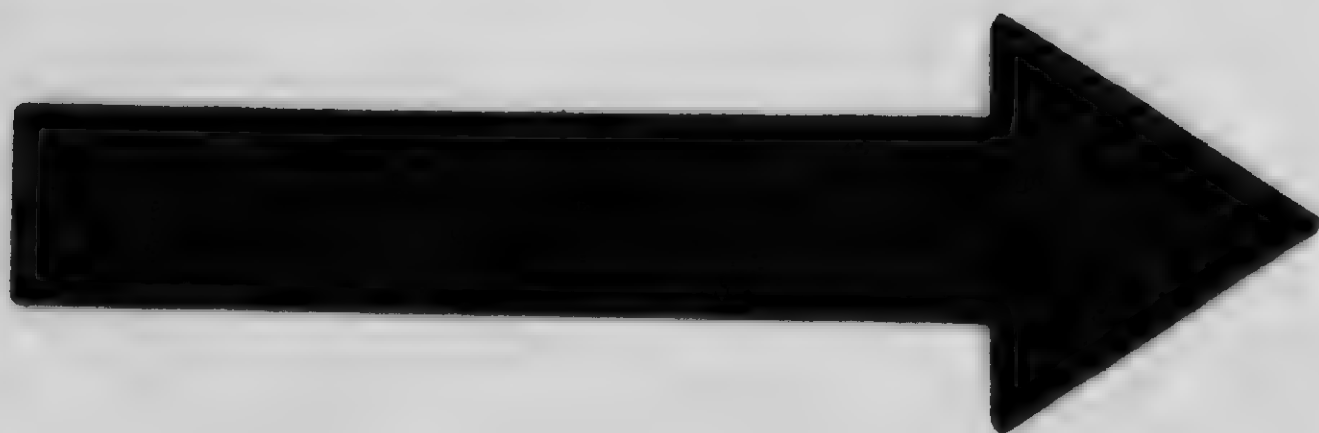
Nevertheless, when, immediately after the marriage ceremony, someone addressed her as Mrs. Pottlebury, Patricia smiled.

BOOK IV
LADY CLEMENTINA

CHAPTER I

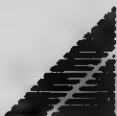
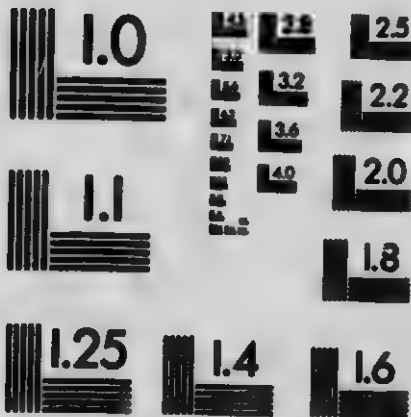
DORRIE stood in a garden and looked at the flowers. A young man stood beside her and looked at Dorrie. He thought her very delightful to look at; and she was. She was seventeen now, and quite as pretty at seventeen as she had been at seven. But she had been pretty all her short life long; without any lapses or transition periods of plainness. She had been neither lanky nor lumpy, neither bony nor bulgy; but always slim, rounded, and properly proportioned; with a skin soft and smooth and white, and eyes as blue and innocent as forget-me-nots.

The garden she was in was not the garden of the Beeches, but an older, larger garden belonging to a house called Holt Hall. Dorrie was staying at Holt Hall with the Fortescues, and her friend, Gwendolen Saunders-Parr, who was the late Mr. Fortescue's niece, was staying there too. Gwendolen, indeed, had been the bridge which spanned the space between Holt Hall and the Beeches: it was as Gwendolen's friend that Dorrie had been invited. Not, however, at Gwendolen's suggestion. The suggestion had come from Len Fortescue, and his mother had acted on it because she acted on most suggestions made by Len.



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Len, paying periodic visits to Stottleham, had seen the long black legs of the pretty kid gradually obscured by a longer length of petticoats, and at his last visit had found that the child Dorrie had become an almost young lady. Not quite, for she was not yet "out," and was not to be out for another year at the very least; but her hair was up, and her skirts were down and she wore high heels to her shoes.

It was after this last visit that Len made the suggestion that Dorrie should be asked to stay at Holt Hall; and his mother accordingly sat down and wrote a polite note to Mrs. Bonham; and because his mother was Lady Clementina, Mrs. Bonham accepted the invitation.

Years before, when Lady Clementina had paid a visit to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Saunders-Parr, she and Georgina had met. Mrs. Bonham had a lively recollection of Lady Clementina, but Lady Clementina had no recollection at all of Mrs. Bonham. This, however, did not matter, since Georgina was unconscious that she had been forgotten; and the fact that she and Lady Clementina had met, made it quite correct for Dorrie to accept the invitation.

Georgina, indeed, was extremely pleased about the visit: Lady Clementina, on the other hand, was not pleased at all. She had not been nearly so much impressed by the Stottleham best set as the best set was impressed by itself, and she was not eager to entertain the girl whom Len described as ripping. But she was one of the mothers who never thwart their sons for fear of the consequences. If a young man does not have his way, he is sure to persist in getting it, whereas if you let him have it he will probably cease to want it. Such was Lady Clementina's philosophy.

As Len was the only son and his father had been a rich man, it was most important that he should marry the right sort of wife; and the way to ensure his marrying the wrong one was to refuse to ask her to stry when he suggested it. Lady Clementina was prepared to receive every wrong one that Len fancied he fancied; especially as it was much easier to damn them with faint praise when they were at Holt Hall than when they were in provincial towns or in choruses at the theatres.

Accordingly she wrote the polite invitation which Georgina politely accepted; and accordingly, when Gwendolen Saunders-Parr arrived at Holt Hall, Dorrie arrived too.

CHAPTER II

LADY CLEMENTINA, when she saw Dorrie, was dreadfully disappointed. From Len's description she had expected to see a pretty girl, but of a prettiness not the least like Dorrie's; and when Dorrie followed Gwendolen into the hall, Lady Clementina's heart suffered severe contortions; for it sank deep down, and at the same time it went out to Dorrie.

She had meant not to like her, and she was terribly afraid that she would be obliged to like her; she had expected not to think her more than ordinarily pretty, and she saw at a glance that her prettiness was out of the ordinary. It was impossible not to admit that she was perfect of her type; and the worst of it was that her type was the type which Lady Clementina most admired. Dorrie's beauty was neither very subtle nor too intelligent nor markedly spiritual n r

at all statuesque. She was just full of life and grace and colour and sweetness ; and was not a bit bouncing, which Lady Clementina had thought she might be, nor at all awkward, which Lady Clementina had hoped she might appear. She was in fact everything which Lady Clementina did not want her to be.

So on the May morning when Dorrie was looking at the flowers and Len was looking at Dorrie, Lady Clementina, looking at both of them from a window, could not but admit that it would be excusable if Len did fall truly in love with her ; nay, that it would be almost inexcusable if he didn't. Of course she hoped it would not be anything permanent or serious ; if it were, if Len's fancy proved to be something he could not be laughed or cajoled out of, Lady Clementina felt that she would be obliged to oppose it tooth and nail. She wanted a daughter-in-law belonging to Society, not to Stottleham, and Len must be preserved from the snare of a heedless attachment.

But she did not want to fight ; it would be hateful to oppose Len ; and besides the hatefulness of opposition, she was conscious that she would be handicapped in the encounter. She had a weakness—and she knew it—for a pretty face ; good looks in man or woman appealed to her with a special appeal ; and Dorrie, she well knew, would be a disconcerting foe. It was horribly difficult to cold-shoulder a girl when what you really wanted to do was to hug her.

It was positively annoying that the two looked so well together. And they did : it was no use denying it. Len was hardly as good-looking in his way as Dorrie was in hers, but good-looking he most decidedly was ; in the kind of way too which just fitted in with Dorrie's. He was slender as she was, and admirably

made; brown, compared with her fairness; and with dark eyes that his mother thought fascinating—and of course Dorrie would.

Dorrie! Yes, there Lady Clementina had already stumbled. She had determined that she would most frigidly Miss Bonham Len's fancy, and before the girl had been twenty-four hours in the house she had called her Dorrie. She had tried to retrieve her mistake by affecting to look upon Dorrie as a mere child; but child or not, it was an idiotic thing to have done; and the exasperating Len was obviously delighted.

What was he saying to the girl now? She was half turned away from him. "No doubt she knows," thought Lady Clementina, "that her profile is charming." Ah, now she looks round; and now they both laugh. What at? Young people laugh at such silly things. Better than sentiment anyhow. But they laugh sometimes on the very verge of sentiment—out of pure nervousness.

Lady Clementina sighed.

CHAPTER III

"I SUPPOSE I must go on calling you Miss Bonham," Len said.

"If you like."

"I don't like, but—now your hair's up."

"Then I must go on with Mr. Fortescue."

"My hair isn't up," said Len.

"Well, it isn't down," said Dorrie.

This is what they laughed at. It was quite as silly as Lady Clementina supposed; and also it was not as far away from sentiment as she would have desired.

"I don't see why we should," Len went on.

"You began it," said Dorrie.

"Did I? Well, I—you looked so awfully grown up you know, that I . . . Shall we drop it?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Say 'Yes, Len.'"

"Yes, Len."

"I wish you'd look at me when you speak to me."

"It's so difficult to look at people when they're standing beside you. You've got to keep on twisting your neck."

"I'll stand where you *don't* have to twist your neck."

Len moved and stood straight in front of Dorrie.

"Now, look, Dorrie!"

Dorrie looked. Len of course looked too, and they continued to look at one another for what, from an onlooker's point of view, was quite a long time.

"Whatever are they up to now?" said Lady Clementina to herself. "I almost think I'd better go out."

She went out, but it was really not much use. She could not stay out—not all the morning; and she knew quite well that as soon as she went in, they would begin again; and if she did not go in, Len would think her a bore. It was most difficult, especially as they made such an ideal couple. If only Lady Clementina could have hated Dorrie instead of finding her delightful! If only she could have thought her vulgar or bad style or provincial or anything but charming! She did say to herself that Dorrie was a minx; but she knew it was not true; and as for trying to get anything to Dorrie's disadvantage out of Gwendolen . . .! Gwendolen would say nothing but that Dorrie was a dear.

Lady Clementina, when she went in after talking inanely for a few minutes to Len and Dorrie, suggested to Gwendolen that she and Captain Le Marchant should go out and play tennis with her cousin and her friend. Gwendolen said "Certainly," and she and Captain Le Marchant went out as suggested and stood laughing and talking with Dorrie and Len. Then they wandered off and disappeared in a shrubbery, while Len and Dorrie strolled away and were lost to sight in the rose walk; and neither of the couples came into view again till lunch time.

By lunch time, however, Lady Clementina felt a little better. Not that the situation had improved; it had if anything grown worse, since *tête-à-tête* conversations in rose walks do not tend to diminish imprudence; but in the interval between the window and the lunch table she had, as she said to herself, done something, and was somewhat soothed by the calming effect of action.

What she had done was to write a letter to her sister-in-law and make enquiries. It was better in any case to know the ins and outs of what you had to deal with. For aught Len knew, Dorrie's grandmother might have been a charwoman—both her grandmothers might have been charwomen or something of the kind, and one of them, perhaps, a drunkard; and her grandfathers non-existent; and *surely* that sort of thing would put Len off. If on the other hand . . . there were of course the Bonshire Bonhams . . . and looks counted for something . . . and there might be money. . . . For as Len would have enough money to support half a dozen wives, it was of course imperative that his one wife should possess a fortune.

CHAPTER IV

LADY CLEMENTINA was not the only person at Holt Hall who observed Len and Dorrie from a window. There were many windows at the Hall, some quite high up, for the house had three storeys, and it was from one of the uppermost windows that another pair of eyes looked down upon Dorrie and Len.

And with what a different aim, from what a different standpoint, with what different doubts !

Lady Clementina looked upon Dorrie as decidedly beneath her son : these other eyes saw her as miles above him. Miles ? Perhaps leagues. Therein, as to whether it was miles or leagues, lay the doubt. For of course she was miles above all men and leagues above most. None could quite reach her level, not even a prince ; but *the* one must be at least within measurable distance of her.

It was Hannah of course who looked from the upper window ; nobody else would have seen as Hannah saw ; Georgina herself could not have taken up such an attitude.

Hannah, in many ways, was having the time of her life. For there she was, at Holt Hall, waiting upon Dorrie ; without any need for discretion, any fear of offence, any interference or regulations. She had Miss Dorrie all to herself whenever Miss Dorrie was within the four walls of her bedroom : getting up, going to bed, doing her hair, changing her frock, putting her hat on, taking it off, dressing for dinner. On all these occasions, there was Hannah feeding up her starved heart with the joy of devoted service : on all these occasions it was as though Dorrie were

once more in the nursery, and Hannah had re-become Nurse. And the beauty, the exquisite delight of it was, that Dorrie was as pleased as Hannah; that she loved Hannah to brush her hair for twenty minutes at a time; that she insisted upon Hannah tucking her up in bed; and that she never allowed Hannah to leave her bedside until she had kissed her good-night.

And it had all come about because Holt Hall was such a very big house. The beneficence of big houses! Mrs. Saunders-Parr, going to tea with Mrs. Bonham when the visit was first planned, had mentioned that Gwendolen would take a maid.

"I don't say that it's necessary, especially in her aunt's house. But in these big houses you can't always depend upon housemaids. They're accustomed to people bringing their own attendants, and are apt not to care about waiting on visitors."

"Quite so," Mrs. Bonham had replied; "I am glad to hear there will be no difficulty about Dorrie taking her own maid, for I should much prefer it."

Dorrie, as a matter of fact, had no own maid. The parlourmaid did what waiting she required, and Hannah attended on Mrs. Bonham. But if Gwendolen took a maid, Dorrie must take one too; and Georgina, moreover, could not tolerate the idea of the Holt Hall housemaids condescending to her daughter because she was maidless.

This being so, there really was nobody to play the part of maid, save Hannah. Since the departure of Miss Kimmidge, Georgina had started an under parlourmaid; but the under parlourmaid was both fat and flighty and neither looked the part, nor would have played it with any distinction. Hannah on the

other hand was free from flightiness and *embonpoint* and looked the respectable family servant if she looked anything at all.

Georgina did have a vision of engaging a smart French maid for the occasion; but could she get smartness and Frenchness and reliability all in one? Moreover, a maid engaged for the occasion would probably have confided to the servants' hall that she was occasional. Georgina's customary good sense speedily banished the vision, and she decided in favour of Hannah. The absurd tie between nurse and nursling was now, she considered, broken; and even were it not wholly dissolved, a week's confiding of Dorrie to Hannah could do no harm. Having decided what she was going to do, she communicated her decision to Mrs. Vearing, and Mrs. Vearing wholeheartedly commended the wisdom of her course.

Thus it was that Hannah, from an upper window, was able to contemplate what Lady Clementina observed from a lower one.

CHAPTER V

HANNAH was quite pleased with Holt Hall. It was not a royal palace; but it was a princely home—or so it seemed to Hannah. She passed the home: her only doubt was as to its owner. Was he in any true sense, in any appreciable degree, a prince? Plain Mister he was; not His Highness nor My Lord nor His Worship; and he ought to have possessed all these titles. But Hannah, though she had vaguely dreamed of the son of a reigning royalty, had, in her imaginings, rather the conception of a prince in a fairy tale than of an heir to a throne. He must look like one any-

how ; and whatever his lineage or his prospects, had he failed to pass her criterion of appearance, Hannah would have disdained him. Now Len, to look at, was rather like what she thought a prince ought to look like. To be sure, having no title at all, Hannah would never have admitted his claims, his looks notwithstanding, save for one all-powerful consideration ; the consideration, namely, that Miss Dorrie evidently admitted them ; that she admitted them was obvious to anyone who took observations from a window.

The question in Hannah's mind was not, was he worthy ? for he could not be that ; but was he as near to being worthy as it was possible for mortal man to be ? While Lady Clementina at one window was debating whether it were possible to disentangle Len from Dorrie, Hannah at another was wondering if it would be advisable to try to lure Dorrie from Len. Both had qualms ; Lady Clementina because she could not help seeing that they made an ideal couple ; Hannah because she could not help feeling that Dorrie was already bound up in Len, that it would be almost cruel as well as futile to try to turn her away from him.

Len and Dorrie meanwhile went on their way rejoicing.

It never occurred to Dorrie to do anything but rejoice. The world was perfectly delightful ; everybody and everything was charming and she was as happy as the day was long ; happier ; since she went on being happy after the day was done. She had none of Miss Kimmidge's misgivings, because she was devoid of Miss Kimmidge's realization. She did not question if Len were in love with her, because she did not know that she was in love with Len. Lady Clementina knew—in her astute mind ; and

Hannah knew—in her heart of hearts; but Dorrie had no idea what had happened to her. She only knew that everything was delicious; and she wrote home to darling Mummy that she was enjoying herself *immensely*.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. SAUNDERS-PARR replied almost immediately to Lady Clementina's letter of enquiry. She assured dearest Clemmy that dear Mrs. Bonham was a delightful woman and was considered quite an acquisition to Stottleham society. ("What do I care," thought Lady Clementina, "for Stottleham society?") She had been a Miss Smythe; and Mrs. Saunders-Parr didn't know *which* Smythe or if it was any of *the* Smythes; but the father had made a fortune—coal or beer; she wasn't sure which, but at any rate something quite respectable. As for Mr. Bonham, he had been a charming man, though rather a spendthrift. Mrs. Saunders-Parr could not say for certain whether he was Bonshire, but she believed the family was county, and there was a baronet, she *thought*, somewhere about in it, though it might be only a knight.

Lady Clementina, reading the letter, first turned up her nose and then turned down the corners of her mouth. It was just about as tiresome as it could be. She wanted family for Len, and there was nothing you could call family *there*; and, on the other hand, there was no drunken charwoman to hurl at Len's head. Money? There was a little money. Muriel wrote that Mrs. Bonham was quite well off—comfortable, and of course Dorrie would have it all. But

well off—in Stottleham ! It would be nothing to make a difference. It might serve Dorrie as pin-money, but—Lady Clementina set her mental teeth—"but as the wife of some other man than my son," she said to herself.

With her mental teeth set very tight, Lady Clementina went downstairs. She went into her boudoir, from the window of which she had a few days ago observed Len and Dorrie in the garden. She sat down by that same window and began to think out how she could save Len from the blandishments of that minx ; for she had made up her mind now that Dorrie was a minx ; it was easier to be horrid to a minx.

She had not been sitting thinking very long, when the door opened and in marched Len, holding Dorrie by the hand.

Both of them were radiant, and Len said, as if he were imparting the most delightful news :

"Mother, I've brought you my future wife."

Lady Clementina gasped.

"My—dear—Len," she said.

"I knew you would be awfully surprised," Len went on. "I kept it all dark because I didn't want anybody to guess till I'd made sure—of *her*."

"I—I——" said Lady Clementina.

"So dark," laughed Len, "that even *she* was surprised."

They both stood there smiling at Lady Clementina, and Lady Clementina looked back at them with her mouth open,—but not in a smile.

"May I kiss you ?" said Dorrie.

And Lady Clementina, who meant to say all sorts of unpleasant things and was wondering how best

to begin, somehow said, before she knew what she was doing : " Yes."

" I'm *so* glad," said Dorrie after the kiss, and beaming at Lady Clementina, " that Len's got such a lovely mother."

" As if," thought Lady Clementina, " *she* was the one who had to accept *me*."

She thought this as much as she could think anything, but she could not think properly at all : she was giddy with bewilderment. She wanted to say that she would not give her consent, that nothing would induce her to give her consent ; but she could not get the words out. I. only they had asked for her consent, it would have been easier ; but they did not ask ; they took it for granted.

Then, when Dorrie had kissed her, Len kissed her, and they both hovered about her, asking her if she wasn't surprised and if she was pleased. Lady Clementina, of course, was neither the one nor the other, but she found herself implying that she was both ; she even found herself, as they went on talking, laughing at the ridiculous things they said. At last Dorrie said she must go and write to Mummy.

" I *hope* she'll be pleased ; I *think* she will. But of course," she said to Lady Clementina, " she doesn't know Len nearly as well as you know me."

" So *my* satisfaction is taken for granted, while Mrs. Bonham . . . Oh Lord ! " thought Lady Clementina.

CHAPTER VII

DORRIE went up to her bedroom to write to Mrs. Bonham, and in her bedroom she found Hannah.

" Oh, Hannah," said Dorrie, " what do you think ? "

"I don't know," said Hannah. It was what she had said to Miss Kimmidge when Miss Kimmidge had asked her the same question in approximately the same circumstances.

"Nurse," said Dorrie, "I'm engaged to be married."

Hannah, when Miss Kimmidge had made a similar announcement, had said: "I never"; but she did not say it now; she said nothing at all. Instead of saying anything, Hannah burst into tears.

"Nurse *dear*," said Dorrie, "are you—aren't you . . . ?"

"Oh, Miss Dorrie!"

"Have you got toothache?"

"No, Miss Dorrie, oh no."

"Then . . . Oh, I wish you wouldn't."

"To think of it, Miss Dorrie!"

"But don't you like to think of it?"

If only Dorrie, distressed and taken aback, had looked downstairs as she looked now, Lady Clementina would have put her foot down and stamped on both her and Len.

"Oh yes, Miss, but . . ."

"Is it tears of joy?" asked Dorrie, cheering up.

"I daresay, Miss Dorrie." Hannah dried her eyes.

"To think of you, that I used to get up in the night to give a drink to—only yesterday as it seems."

"It wasn't yesterday, you silly thing, but ever so long ago; I hardly remember it. But do make haste and congratulate me."

"I do, Miss Dorrie, and many of them. Only . . ."

"Only what? Oh, Nurse, you *are* a wet blanket."

"Miss Dorrie," said Hannah solemnly, "is he good enough?"

Dorrie laughed. "Miles *too* good. Why, he's perfect."

"Not so perfect as you, Miss Dorrie."

"That shows how much *you* know about it. But it's only because you brought me up. If you'd given us both drinks in the night, you'd have liked him ever so much the best."

"No, nor I shouldn't, Miss."

"Yes, Nurse dear, you would. But I'm far too happy to argue."

"He ain't got anything before his name, Miss Dorrie."

"Anything before . . . What *do* you mean?"

"You ought to have somebody with the kind of name that I could say My Lord or Royal 'Ighness or something of that to him."

"Oh, Nurse, you *are* a snob."

"I ain't, Miss Dorrie, but I always looked for you to have a prince, or anyhow a duke."

"Well, his grandfather's an earl."

"That may be, but you ain't going to marry his grandfather."

"Thank heaven, no."

"Is he an old gentleman?"

"Oh, ever so old—I suppose."

"P'raps when he dies, your . . ." Hannah paused, arrested by the prose of an everyday vocabulary. "Your lover," Hannah went on, "will come into the title."

"Oh no. It's on his mother's side, you see."

"What does that matter, Miss Dorrie? Father or mother, what's the difference? Why shouldn't it come through his mother?"

"Oh, because—I don't know, but it never does. It's the law or something."

"If he marries you, Miss Dorrie, it ought to be arranged so as he gets it."

"Whatever does it matter what he's *called*? Anyhow, if you wanted me to marry a prince, you've got your wish, for he *is* a prince."

"Is he, Miss Dorrie?" Hannah was a little wistful. "It's what I wondered."

"Of course he is. Why, you've only got to look at him."

"He's sort of like one."

"Don't you think him *very* handsome?"

"Andsome he is. And I expect he's rich. My sister, whose fate was pore but beautiful, used to say, when Mother was against it, 'If I've nothing to eat,' she says, 'I'll have something to look at.' But it's better to be rich as well. He *is* rich, Miss Dorrie, I suppose?"

"I don't know, I——"

Dorrie paused, looked round the room and out of the window across the garden and park. "I—I suppose he must be," she said.

"No doubt this house belongs to him," said Hannah.

"I suppose it must. It seems enormous, doesn't it?—after the Beeches."

"It's just the sort of 'ouse, Miss Dorrie, you ought to have."

"Nurse," said Dorrie, "I want you to do me a favour."

"You know, Miss Dorrie, when you put your arms round my neck, I can't never say no."

"I want you, Nurse, to like him and think him just as nice as if you used to give *him* drinks in the night."

"I'll try and pretend, Miss Dorrie, as I did so."
"That's a good Nurse. And now I must write to Mummy. I wonder what she'll say!"

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT Georgina said it would be impossible to reproduce. She was quite as much upset as was Lady Clementina, but in a different way; and a great deal more surprised. Faint hopes that such a result might ultimately be brought about through the visit to Holt Hall had stirred within her; but so soon . . . so suddenly . . . And Dorrie was still so young—too young . . .

Georgina's bacon was cold before she turned to eat it, and then she could not eat it. She breakfasted off two mouthfuls of toast and a cup of coffee, and immediately, without even waiting to order the dinner, set out for Mrs. Vearing's. She somehow never thought of Dr. Rayke; Alicia instinctively was her goal; perhaps because there was nothing to consult about and a supreme something to confide.

Mrs. Vearing was in the garden, nailing creepers to the arbour.

"My dear Georgina! So early? I hope there's nothing . . . Dorrie . . .?"

"It's Dorrie; but nothing bad. Do let's go in! The damp and the excitement together . . ."

"But of course," said Mrs. Vearing.

They went in—to the drawing-room, Mrs. Vearing putting her head into the study on the way, to tell Adam she was not to be disturbed. And then, in the drawing-room, Georgina told her news.

Mrs. Vearing was fully as much impressed as Mrs.

Bonham hoped she would be, and fully as much excited and delighted.

"My dear Georgina, I do congratulate you. And Len Fortescue is such a charming young fellow."

"He is, I think; and I believe him to be steady and all that, as well. I could not let Dorrie marry anyone who wasn't nice, however rich or influential."

"I know you couldn't," said Mrs. Vearing; and she was right; for Georgina was worldly wise and not worldly foolish. If Len had been a drunkard or a gambler, Georgina would not have allowed Dorrie to marry him, in spite of his mother being Lady Clementina and Holt Hall his heritage.

"I shan't say a word about it," Georgina said, "till it's absolutely settled."

"I shouldn't," agreed Alicia.

"I don't know that I could allow a regular engagement—she's so young——"

"Oh, you *couldn't* stand in their way! Such a darling young couple!"

"Well, we'll see. But as for marriage—of course it's out of the question for another year or two."

"I don't like long engagements," said Mrs. Vearing.

"No, but you must remember that she isn't even out."

"Being out doesn't make you either older or younger."

"That's true. But she is only seventeen. I couldn't think of her marrying till nineteen."

"She'll be eighteen in September." Mrs. Vearing counted on her fingers. "June, July, August, September. Only a year and four months till she's nineteen."

"Why should you be so anxious . . ." said Georgina.

"I can't help," said Alicia deprecatingly, "sympathizing with love's young dream."

"You are so sentimental," said Georgina, but with a smile.

"We can't be all like you, dear Georgina, so wise and sensible."

"Just as well," answered Georgina, but secretly she thought that the world would be a more comfortable and well-ordered place if everybody—all women at any rate—*were* like her.

"*How* excited Mrs. Pottlebury will be!" This was Mrs. Vearing's next remark.

"Yes, won't she? But I shan't tell her yet."

"N-no?" said Mrs. Vearing, who was longing to talk over Dorrie's love story with Patricia.

Mrs. Ludovic Pottlebury lived in Stottleham now. The first three years of her married life had been passed in London: then her husband had been offered the post of Manager of the Stottleham Branch of Messrs. Currie and Co.'s Bank, and he and Patricia and two little Pottleburys had come to settle in Stottleham.

Mrs. Vearing saw a good deal of Mrs. Pottlebury: Mrs. Bonham was friendly, but distant. Patricia was not in her set, and she could not ask her to meet any of her set. So Mrs. Pottlebury was occasionally invited to lunch to meet nobody, and Mrs. Bonham, as very much somebody, occasionally took tea over the Bank and asked the little Pottleburys how old they were. She was thankful, when the Pottleburys dumped themselves down in the High Street, that she had not allowed Dorrie to be bridesmaid to Mrs. Pottlebury; and now that Dorrie was engaged to an earl's grandson she was more thankful than ever.

Patricia accepted the quantity and quality of friendship meted out to her with the same easy philosophy with which she had always accepted dear Mrs. Bonham's generousities and shortcomings. She did not very much care what set she was in; her real set consisted of Ludovic and the little Pottleburys; and anything interesting that occurred in the best set was reported to her by Mrs. Vearing. She had longed to call her second little girl, born in Stottleham, Doris; but the memory of the crushed bridesmaid dictated the substitution of Dorothy; Mrs. Bonham of the Beeches would have resented the presence of a second Dorrie at number three, High Street.

"No," said Georgina, "I shall not tell Mrs. Pottlebury till the engagement is officially announced. She might tell Miss Pottlebury, and then you know what it would be. I shall tell nobody but yourself and, of course, Dr. Rayke."

"Mrs. Pottlebury is so devoted to darling Dorrie. I almost think she might be hurt if she did not hear a *little* bit before the general public."

Mrs. Bonham mused.

"Dorrie shall write her a note," she said, "the day before the announcement appears in the 'Times.'"

CHAPTER IX

WHAT was Lady Clementina to do? There was, or so it seemed to her, absolutely nothing to be done. She had begun by behaving as if she approved, or at any rate as if she did not disapprove; and having accepted a daughter-in-law-that-is-to-be kiss from Dorrie (and Lady Clementina was terribly afraid that

she had returned the kiss), how could she stand forth in the light of day and declare that she was opposed to the marriage?

She couldn't; she felt she couldn't. She imagined how Len would look at her, and how Dorrie . . . If only Dorrie had been vulgarly pretty, or less ingenuous, or a trifle—even a trifle—afraid of her, she might possibly have screwed herself up into appearing the tyrant she felt like. But Dorrie was delightful, and, far from being afraid of Lady Clementina, evidently thought Lady Clementina delightful; and if a person was delightful and thought *you* delightful, how could you suddenly reveal that you were not delightful and didn't think *she* was—especially if you did? Lady Clementina became so confused in trying to catch the tail of her argument in the mouth of her conduct, and so mixed up in the riddles she propounded to herself, that she gave up trying to formulate excuses or a plan of campaign, and lay—to use her own despairing metaphor—like putty in the hands of fate.

The result of being *like* putty was that she found herself moulded into the form which seemed to Len and Dorrie appropriate to a pleased parent. If they wanted anything, a picnic or fireworks or whatever it might be, Len asked for it for Dorrie's sake, not for his own; and Dorrie asked for it "because of our engagement." And they had their picnics and they had their fireworks, and Lady Clementina was acclaimed as an angel while inwardly she felt like a ravening wolf.

And it was not only picnics: she had to do binding, irrevocable things, things that could not be disclaimed or explained away. She found herself writing to "Dear Mrs. Bonham," and expressing all sorts of sentiments

befitting not her feelings but the occasion : she found herself announcing the engagement to her father and to various friends and relations : she found herself espousing Dorrie's cause in the face of family enquiries. She had, of course, to do that ; for if Lady Clementina chose to accept Dorrie (and nobody knew that she had not chosen), what business was it of anybody else's ? It was absurd of relations to suggest that they were turning up their noses, when they did not know what they were turning them up *at*.

"You had better come and be introduced," was Lady Clementina's rejoinder to doubts more or less politely expressed. "For my part I am perfectly satisfied. Len has family and money, and what I put before *everything* is beauty of person and charm of character." Lady Clementina was so much pleased with this phrase that she put it into every letter.

In answer to the letters, several family fiends, as Lady Clementina was accustomed to describe certain of her relations, did come to be introduced ; and all were conquered ; with the exception of one cousin whom Lady Clementina designated the Horror, and the Horror, Lady Clementina declared, was jealous, because she had always wanted to bring about a marriage between Len and her hated offspring. To think of the offspring and to look at Dorrie was a joy ; and Lady Clementina found it impossible to maintain the co-existence of the joy thus generated and of the ravening wolf.

Georgina, meanwhile, was much sought after at Stottleham. Longing for Dorrie's return, which was put off owing to the picnics and the fireworks and Len's devotion and the family curiosity, she was able nevertheless fully to enjoy the renown of Dorrie's

engagement; and after the announcement of it had appeared in the "Times" and the "Morning Post," she went the round of the best set tea-tables, receiving congratulations and talking lightly of Lady Clementina and Holt Hall. Georgina did not take sugar in her tea, but every cup she drank was sweetened with the name of Lady Clementina or Lady Clementina's home. As Miss Pottlebury at the time of Ludovic's engagement had referred to dear Mrs. Bonham, so dear Mrs. Bonham referred to Lady Clementina. Only Mrs. Bonham was much more casual in her references than Miss Pottlebury had been, and Stottleham, much impressed by Dorrie's engagement, was most impressed by the fact that dear Mrs. Bonham did not seem impressed at all. As for Len's grandfather, the earl, Mrs. Bonham made very light of *him*. What was an earl? her manner seemed to say. Georgina, indeed, adopted the tone of having been brought up on earls; and Stottleham began to wonder if it had ever hitherto properly appreciated dear Mrs. Bonham.

CHAPTER X

DORRIE was engaged, but she was not to be married for a year at least. Her marriage and her coming out would practically take place at the same time; for she was to be presented at Court immediately after her marriage by Lady Clementina. In the meantime she was to have the finishing touch put to her education by spending some months abroad with her mother. Georgina had already planned to take her to France and Germany, and the plan was to be carried out.

It meant some weeping and wailing on the part of

Dorrie and Len. To be parted for months! When it was impossible to live without seeing each other every day! It was cruel of Mummy, and hateful of Mother; and to put the lovers off with letters, was to show that neither parent had ever been in love.

They might have been, Dorrie hazarded, and forgotten, because it must have been so long ago. But Len negatived the suggestion.

"Shall ~~we~~ ever forget?" he asked.

And Dorrie immediately recognized the folly of her excuse.

But it was of no use to weep or to wail or to coax or to storm. Georgina was firm, and Lady Clementina, who had thrown away her initial chances of opposition, seized upon this one and was obdurate.

The only one who was heart and soul with Len and Dorrie was Hannah, whose standard of what was fitting for Dorrie was what Dorrie happened to want. But who was Hannah? Her opinion was not even asked—except by Dorrie. And how could Hannah approve of Dorrie going away, since Hannah was to be left at home?

It had occurred to Georgina to take Hannah; because she was trustworthy and handy and did not mind what you asked her to do. But Hannah could not speak French, and the vision of the smart French maid, which had dangled itself before Georgina's mind when Dorrie was invited to Holt Hall, returned, and so forcibly as entirely to outweigh the advantage of Hannah's trustworthiness.

So Georgina went up to London and interviewed maids who were accustomed to travel and who could speak in tongues unknown to Georgina, and she engaged a maid who was French, who was not young

enough to be flighty and not too old to be smart, and who spoke, so she said, both English and German as well as her own language.

The English was not masterly.

"But we don't want her to speak English," said Georgina.

"Except to us, Mummy," said Dorrie.

"Oh, she *understands* all right, and that is what matters."

So it was all arranged. Len spent a few days at the Beeches before the travellers started, and he and Dorrie exchanged all sorts of presents and vows.

"You won't forget me?" Dorrie asked on the last evening.

"Oh, Dorrie, how *can* you?"

"Supposing I was to come back *ugly*?"

"How silly! As if you could!"

"But supposing?"

"I should love you," said Len, "if you were as ugly as sin."

"So should I you," said Dorrie.

That was the sort of way they talked; and they were sometimes, Lady Clementina said, quite silly even before people. Lady Clementina thought them silly, but not so silly as Georgina thought them. But both Lady Clementina and Georgina, when they talked of their silliness, smiled.

BOOK V

LEN AND DORRIE

CHAPTER I

GEORGINA, when she had planned to take Dorrie abroad, had not done so with the idea that Dorrie should be amused or even that she should become acquainted with foreign countries, but with the sole intention that she should learn French and perhaps a little German. The six or eight months on the Continent were to prepare her for future travelling and perhaps for a winter abroad.

And Georgina saw no reason for altering her arrangements. She considered, and Rayke considered, that the classes which had been started in Stottleham after Miss Kimmidge's departure, had provided Dorrie with all the education and accomplishments necessary for a woman; but Dorrie had very little knowledge of foreign languages, and this was a knowledge which Georgina was determined she should possess.

Rayke was doubtful as to the advantage of knowing French and quite sure that nothing was to be gained by knowing German; but Georgina held to her own opinion, Rayke notwithstanding; and now that Dorrie was going to be an earl's grand-daughter-in-law, she felt it to be more necessary than ever that she should be able to speak tongues other than her own. Who could tell what circles Dorrie would

move in? Diplomatic perhaps, and it would never do for her not to be able to talk to foreign ambassadors.

So Dorrie was informed that though she might write to Len as often as she liked and receive as many letters from him as the international post could convey, she must give a portion of her time and a proportion of her attention to the study of the French language. For French was to come first; French, as Georgina said to Mrs. Vearing at her farewell tea, was essential. As for German—well, Georgina would see how much time there was after Dorrie had got a grip of French.

"I quite agree," said Mrs. Vearing, "about the French. Besides, it's the language of diplomatists, as you say, and if darling Dorrie *should* have to meet such bewildering people. . . . As to the German——"

"Yes?" said Mrs. Bonham. "Pray speak out, Alicia, if you have any suggestion to make."

Mrs. Vearing spoke, but with hesitating diffidence. No, she had no suggestion; she only rather felt, with Rayke, that German was hardly necessary.

"Necessary I never said," Georgina corrected; "but it's an advantage. Besides, I believe that Lady Clementina has German relations, and you never know . . . in the future . . ."

"You are so far-seeing, dear Georgina, and you always have a good reason for everything."

"If a woman doesn't know how to do the best for her own child, she can't be good for much," Georgina said graciously.

Mrs. Vearing at this last tea was inclined to be tearful, and when Mrs. Bonham got up and began to say good-bye, she actually *was* tearful.

"What shall I do without you all these months?"

The Guild . . . the parish . . . and our pl . . . pleasant intercourse . . ."

"My dear Alicia, you have the Vicar."

"Dear Adam! yes, but I . . . I have so appreciated our friendship."

"And I, I assure you; and to leave my home . . . Nothing but a sense of duty . . ."

"I know, I know. You have it so strong."

"And after all, Alicia, it's for—comparatively speaking—a very short time. In June at latest, I hope——"

"Promise me," Mrs. Vearing broke in, "that you will come to the Vicarage as soon as ever . . . the very first possible moment after you get back!"

"How absurd!" said Georgina, but she promised; and she kept the promise.

Because of the French it was of no use going to hotels. A family was the right thing; and the right thing in families had been found and arranged with long before Georgina, Dorrie, and Augustine, the maid, left England.

The family lived on the outskirts of Paris, near the Bois de Boulogne, because, as it was summer, it was necessary to be where the air was fresh and where Dorrie was not confined for walks to the Paris streets. It was not a poor family. Georgina eschewed poverty; it was so uncomfortable, she said, when people had nothing to live on but their boarders. She insisted upon a family well enough off not to be dependent on its paying guests, yet willing to receive guests for payment; and when dear Mrs. Bonham insisted, she usually got what she insisted upon. She did in this case.

The family consisted of Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle. Georgina, looking out for a family,

had insisted not only on no poverty, but on no sons. As things had turned out, a son, or even two or three sons, would not have mattered; but when Georgina had started on the quest, there had been no Len to guard Dorrie against the fascinations of fortune-seeking Frenchmen. So there was only Mademoiselle. Dorrie very soon called her Clothilde, and she called Dorrie Chérie. Madame, after a time, called her Chérie too, and Monsieur called her Mademoiselle Charmante; and before she went away he had dropped the Mademoiselle and substituted "ma." They were all what Dorrie called "awfully nice" to her, and they were all very respectful to Georgina, who, finding herself treated with deferential consideration, and Dorrie regarded with enthusiastic admiration, was quite satisfied with the family and resigned to the life she was leading. She wrote to Mrs. Vearing that it was quite a change, and though of course many things were very different from what she had been accustomed to at Stottleham, she could manage for a time to put up with it. Especially as dearest Dorrie was getting on so well with her French.

The French was certainly a success; owing in a great measure to the fact that Mademoiselle was the only one of the family who knew English and that she made a point of never speaking it when she was speaking to Dorrie. All this was very excellent for Dorrie, but rather dull for Georgina. Monsieur and Madame knew no English but "yes" and "all right," and that did not carry them far in conversation. This inability to speak English was, indeed, one of the ways—and they were many—in which Georgina found the people of Paris inferior to the people of Stottleham. She, herself, as it was quite impossible to talk to

Mademoiselle all day, and especially when Mademoiselle was giving Dorrie French lessons, found herself obliged to pick up a little French; and was able to ask for *pain* and *beurre*, and *sucré* and *eau chaud*—for Georgina would not realize that *eau* belonged to the eternal feminine. As for the French maid, Georgina never called Augustine what Augustine called herself, but pronounced her name as is pronounced in English the name of the saint.

The French maid was one of the few people with whom Georgina at this time could have any conversation; but the conversation was restricted, partly because Augustine was a maid, and Georgina considered it unseemly to talk much to servants, and partly because Augustine's English, though unlimited as compared with Georgina's French, was conspicuously limited as compared with Georgina's English. Georgina constantly failed to follow the meaning in the amazing grammar and construction of Augustine's sentences, and Augustine as frequently failed to follow the meaning in Georgina's correctly worded commands and observations.

Augustine was undoubtedly very useful in shopping if once she could be made to understand what Georgina wanted; but it was rather annoying when Mrs. Bonham required shoes, and had repeated carefully to Augustine: "Shoe, shoe, shoe. Do you understand?" to be conveyed to a greengrocer's and find that Augustine was purchasing cabbages. Yet this sort of thing occurred frequently; and it was no compensation to Georgina—or soon ceased to be one—that Augustine repented even unto tears, exclaiming: "My God! how I am beast!"

"I do wish, Augustine," Mrs. Bonham would

remonstrate, "that you would not *say* you understand if you do *not* understand."

"But I thought to understand, and ordinairement I understand all Madame say. But shoe—chou—so words in so tongues, so many—different, confusing, the same, that the head sometimes . . ."

This was the sort of English that Mrs. Bonham found almost as difficult to understand as French, and when Augustine became explanatory, her chief desire was to put an end to the conversation.

Nevertheless Augustine, as Georgina wrote to Mrs. Vearing, was on the whole satisfactory. She was neat and smart-looking and punctual and good tempered; and as Dorrie was soon able to tell her in French what Madame wanted, Georgina ceased to suffer to any great extent from the insufficiency of her English.

"What I am doubtful about," Georgina wrote to Mrs. Vearing, "is whether her German is any better than her English. And if we go to Germany, it will be *very* awkward if she cannot speak the language properly."

But Augustine on this point was emphatic.

"My German vare much better than my English," she asserted with vigour, when Mrs. Bonham managed to convey to her her doubts. "My German like my proper tongue."

And Georgina could not test her. Only time and Germany could show.

CHAPTER II

DORRIE was miserable at being parted from Len, but her misery did not bring about the continual depression which she felt it ought to have occasioned.

The youth in her was frequently cheerful, and she told herself it was horrid of her and disloyal to Len, not realizing that the youth in Len was frequently cheerful too. But how could she fail to be cheerful when Mummy was so sweet, and was so anxious for her to learn French as to be willing to put up with Augustine's English and all sorts of tiresome foreign ways? And as for disloyalty, she was not really disloyal, since she never stopped thinking of Len except sometimes when she was learning French, and she *had* to learn French. But she could not think of Len and French verbs, especially the irregular ones, at the same time; and if—as Mummy pointed out—she was remembering Len when she ought to be learning French verbs, she would not be able to remember French verbs when, later on, she was travelling with Len. Perhaps on their honeymoon! Oh, it was impossible; far, far too wonderful ever to come true. But it made the verbs and all the rest of the horrid grammar which she had never been able to master at the Stottleham French class and could not master now—it made it all seem almost like part of the trousseau. And looked at in that way, it was all right to be happy.

And then, besides the French lessons, there were Monsieur and Madame and Mademoiselle who insisted upon her being gay; and Monsieur and Madame had friends and Mademoiselle had friends; and the friends came to see them and were delighted with Dorrie, and they, also, seemed to think she ought to be gay. Amongst the friends there were of course men as well as women, and men of all ages; men between twenty and thirty, and between thirty and forty, as well as men on the way to fifty and beyond it.

Had it not been for Len, Georgina would have been

in a constant fever of anxiety, for she looked upon all Frenchmen as immoral or fortune-hunters or both; and it was obvious that every one of the men who were received by Madame thought Dorrie charming; and that some thought her very charming indeed. But Len was a complete chaperon, never to be eluded and always on duty. So Georgina breathed with freedom, and even with a certain satisfaction. She did not care twopence how many Frenchmen fell in love with Dorrie, provided Dorrie did not fall in love with a single Frenchman; it was rather gratifying to see their subjugation; and as for Dorrie . . . Georgina never had a qualm. She knew that Len filled Dorrie's whole male horizon, and the foreground as well, and the middle distance.

CHAPTER III

IN October Dorrie had influenza. It was not a bad attack, but it was sufficient to disturb and excite both Georgina and the French family. Georgina discussed at length with Mademoiselle as to how Dorrie could have caught the disease; but neither of them arrived at any conclusion; nor did Monsieur or Madame, nor Augustine, nor the *bonne à tout faire*. The one thing certain was that she had got it, and a doctor had to be called in. "For I should never dream," wrote Georgina to Mrs. Vearing, "of allowing my darling Dorrie to be ill without seeing a doctor. But how I miss my dear friend, Dr. Rayke, and his ever-ready advice, and my trusted physician at home."

Dr. Béchamel turned out however to be all that even Georgina could desire in respect of competence, kindness and attention; and it was wonderful (and

this too Georgina wrote to Mrs. Vearing) how well Dorrie was able to answer his enquiries in French. "She put out her tongue *at once*," wrote Georgina, "and he never had to say it again or point to it or make signs as I have to do when I speak to Augustine. Sometimes I almost wish I had brought Hannah, in spite of her teeth and her dowdiness, but when we come to move further on, no doubt we shall find the benefit of Augustine's French and German."

Dr. Béchamel spoke French to Dorrie, but if he had not been able to speak English to Georgina, Georgina would have insisted upon a doctor of her own nationality. She had in fact wanted to call in an Englishman before Dr. Béchamel was summoned, but Dorrie had said it would be so much more amusing to be ill—if Mummy would have it that she was ill—in French, and Georgina had given way. Dr. Béchamel's English was not perfect, but it was ever so much better than Augustine's, and, after Augustine, the fact that Georgina could understand Dr. Béchamel and Dr. Béchamel could understand Georgina, made his deficiencies seem of no account.

The worst of Dorrie's illness—for she was soon better—was that it gave Len an excuse for coming over.

Having seized upon the excuse, nothing would induce him to let go of it again. He told Lady Clementina that it would be impossible for him to settle to anything unless he saw for himself that Dorrie was all right; and he wrote the same thing to Georgina: while Dorrie on her side, as soon as she heard that there was the slightest chance of Len's coming over, declared to Mummy and wrote to Lady Clementina that she was quite sure she should never get up her strength unless Len were there to help her to do it. So he came.

"You really must not imagine," he had said to his mother, "that we are children in arms."

"As far as reasonableness goes," answered Lady Clementina, "you're barely short-coated."

"I don't see any unreasonableness in not wanting to be everlastingly separated from a person you're as good as married to."

"Of course you don't," said Lady Clementina, "that's the point."

"Mothers," said Len to Dorrie after he had arrived in Paris, "think you are a sort of infant till you're eighty."

"Yes, Mummy never realizes how old I am. I suppose they can't help it," answered Dorrie. She added: "But I'm sure they mean to be nice."

"Oh, they're nice all right. Only so absurd."

By the time Len arrived, Dorrie was looking almost quite well.

"I wasn't really ill, you know," she told him. "But Mummy wanted me to go to bed so badly that I went. She's been so sweet—about my learning French and all that, and I know she doesn't really like being abroad a bit—that I felt I must do something in return."

"I think it's rotten," said Len, "coming abroad when *she* doesn't want to come, and *you* don't want to come, and *I* don't want you to come."

"It's so that I can talk to foreigners if we meet them after we're married," Dorrie explained.

"If a fellow can't talk English I'm sure I don't want to talk to him, and I shouldn't think *you* would."

Dorrie had rather liked talking to the Frenchmen who had so very much liked talking to her, but she did not say so: she felt at the moment as if she ought not to have liked it at all.

"You almost have to talk to them sometimes if you're in their country," she said. "If you travel, for instance."

"Depends on who you're travelling with. If you and I together . . . we shouldn't want to talk to anybody except each other."

"No," said Dorrie, "of course not. Except to order things."

"You needn't bother about *that*: all waiters speak English."

"Perhaps in out-of-the-way places . . ."

"Then we wouldn't go to out-of-the-way places."

At that they both laughed. It still took very little to make them laugh.

CHAPTER IV

It was dreadful when Len went away; dreadful, Dorrie felt, for Dorrie, but much worse, Georgina felt, for Georgina.

"That's just what I was afraid of," Georgina said, "that his coming would upset you."

"It isn't his coming," said Dorrie tearfully; "it's his going."

"That's what I mean. If he came, of course he had to go."

"He needn't have, Mummy, if he'd stayed on."

"Really, darling, you are absurd. How could he stay?"

It seemed to Dorrie that it would have been quite easy; but it was no use arguing with Mummy, especially as Len's departure was an accomplished fact; so what she said was:

"Must I learn German when I know French?"

And to this Georgina replied : " We'll see."

Georgina when she said, " We'll see," knew quite well *what* they would see. Germany had been already decided upon by the two mammas ; not for the sake of the language, for Georgina was willing to waive the language, and Lady Clementina did not care two brass farthings whether Len's charming, unwelcome little bride knew German or not, but for the sake of an excuse to keep the lovers apart. Len had an examination to pass and he would not settle down to work if Dorrie were about : of that Lady Clementina was quite sure. As for Dorrie, she would settle to nothing if Len were about : of that Georgina was equally sure.

And hanging and hovering about, Len was sure to be. He was supposed to be eating dinners at Lincoln's Inn, for he was to have a profession, though he was not to practise it. But what was a dinner now and again ? Except for those dinners Georgina knew that he would board and perhaps lodge at the Beeches ; and if not, Dorrie would be boarding and lodging at Holt Hall. Alicia Vearing had been quite right ; an engagement of any length was most undesirable ; but while it lasted—and it had to last, at any rate till the following summer—the only possibility of peace was to keep the Straits of Dover, if not a larger sea, between Len and Dorrie. Georgina would have preferred the Atlantic Ocean.

So Germany was really a foregone conclusion, though, for the sake of keeping Dorrie amused by travelling about, it was not to be all Germany ; it was to be Belgium and Holland to begin with and Germany for a couple of months or so at the end. In her heart Georgina looked forward to Germany ; it was too far off for Len to run over. And she did

not want Len ; she wanted Dorrie all to herself ; and if she could not send Len away, she could at any rate take away Dorrie. Long ago she had disposed of Nurse by turning her into Hannah. She could not turn Len into anything—except a husband ; and though she wished him to be Dorrie's husband, she wished intensely that he should, at any rate till he *was* her husband, keep out of the way of Dorrie's mother. If Dorrie's engagement had been broken off, Georgina would have been miserable, but . . . but . . .

Once upon a time Dorrie had outgrown Nurse, and Georgina had been pleased : then she had outgrown Miss Kimmidge, and Georgina had not been displeased : and now she had outgrown Georgina, and Georgina—Georgina found it hard to give way to Len, even though he *was* an earl's grandson. But in her heart of hearts she did not think that Dorrie really could outgrow her : in her heart of hearts she thought she could not by anybody be outgrown. Of course just now . . . but later on, when Dorrie had married and settled down, Georgina expected to be rather to the fore. She remembered that after a few months with Theodore it had been rather a relief to go home for a little without him : Dorrie no doubt would find the same thing. In the meantime, from every point of view, Germany, preceded by travelling in Belgium and Holland, was advisable.

CHAPTER V

So to Germany they went. But not straight to Germany, not till February, and not till Len had run over again. This time it was because of his birth-

day. His birthday was in January, and it was absolutely necessary, as he had gone to Holt Hall 'or Christmas, that he should go to Paris for his birthday. Lady Clementina, on one side of the Straits of Dover, gave way; Georgina, on the other side, gave way too. For one thing it was no use not giving way; Len would have come all the same; and then, the Germany Bill having been carried, it was possible to accept the Birthday Amendment.

So there was Len; in and out of the flat all day; talking the vilest French to Monsieur and Madame, and the latest English slang to Mademoiselle; very much the son-in-law to Georgina, and overwhelmingly the lover to Dorrie. Not that Dorrie found him overwhelming, but everybody else did.

"Mummy," said Dorrie, "we've hit upon a most delightful plan. It's that my birthday is to be our wedding day. You said I wasn't to be married till I was nineteen, and so I shan't be; and yet all the time I *am* nineteen I shall be married."

"You can't fix days so long before," said Georgina. "It may be on a Sunday."

"Oh, but it isn't. We've looked it up and it's a Wednesday—as near the middle of the week as it *could* be."

"We'll see," said Georgina.

"Len wants my veil to be net, not lace," Dorrie went on.

"I don't want a bit of pattern coming over her face," said Len.

"A twirligig on my nose," laughed Dorrie. "Only if it was *red* . . . ?"

"You never had a red nose in your life," said Len. He turned to Monsieur, who had come into the room

and who was evidently trying to understand by means of his eyes something of the conversation that his ears could not convey to him. "Mademoiselle," said Len, holding his nose, "jamais rouge."

"But no, Monsieur," said Monsieur, "certainly Mademoiselle has no occasion to rouge. Mademoiselle has the complexion of an angel."

"He—er—what does he say?" asked Len.

"He says I don't need to rouge."

"What an old idiot! Of course not. Non, non," said Len to Monsieur, "pas—pas—what the dickens is cheeks? Joues, did you say? Pas joues, nay—nay. Nay, nay, nay. Comprenez?"

It was evident that Monsieur did not "comprenez": Dorrie was obliged to explain.

"Doesn't understand his own language, the old rotter," said Len.

"But it isn't quite his language," said Dorrie. "You say it so funnily, Len, even when you get the words right."

"Well, he evidently means well from the way he looks at you, so tell him it's all right."

This was the way in which Len spoke French to Monsieur and Madame; but Monsieur and Madame thought him a *charmant garçon*, and so did Mademoiselle; and they all agreed that he was well suited to that *chère petite* and almost worthy of her.

He was very attentive to Georgina and listened to all she had to say about Dorrie and to all the advice she gave him. The advice rather bored him, but he listened all the same, and he was never bored when Mrs. Bonham talked about Dorrie

CHAPTER VI

THE evening before Len went back to England, some friends of Monsieur and Madame gave a ball. Monsieur and Madame and Mademoiselle were all invited, and so were Georgina and Dorrie and Len. Georgina did not want to go; she thought it would not be quite the right thing for Dorrie, who had never been to a ball before, and was not properly "out," and too exhausting for Len just before his journey. But Dorrie and Len insisted upon accepting the invitation; that is to say that they coaxed and teased till Georgina gave way.

"It's just because I've never been to a ball that I ought to go," said Dorrie.

"It would be rather absurd if Dorrie had never been to anything grown up before she's married," said Len.

"Especially when I *am* grown up—eighteen. Why, Vera Marsden——"

"And Gwen Saunders-Parr!" added Len.

Mrs. Bonham's usual firmness broke down under the repeated attacks made upon her in the character of mother and mother-in-law: she accepted the ball, and ordered an evening dress for Dorrie—the first real grown-up evening dress Dorrie had ever had.

It was a most beautiful dress, so they all agreed, down to the *bonne à tout faire*, who waited on at the flat to see Mademoiselle attired in it. It was white, of course, and what the dressmaker called "très simple" and "très jeune fille"; but to Dorrie it was a wonder of the dressmaking art and to Len the garment of an angel—when Dorrie wore it; while everyone else agreed that it was exactly suited to Dorrie and the occasion.

"How it becomes her!" said Madame, and Georgina, when Madame's remark was translated to her, smiled at Madame and agreed.

"I really think it does."

"*La petite est charmante*," remarked Monsieur, and Len, catching a word he recognized, repeated: "Char-mong, charmong, charmong."

Mrs. Bonham and Madame sat together during a large part of the evening, and whenever Dorrie came to them or passed near them, Madame made appreciative remarks. Georgina did not understand the remarks, but she understood the speech of Madame's face and the look in her eyes, and was dear Mrs. Bonham of Stottleham in her most gracious mood.

Dorrie was radiant, in spirits and in beauty. She said she was going to forget disgusting to-morrow, and she did. Len delighted in dancing with her, and when he was not dancing with her, he had the delight of looking at her dancing with somebody else. He was not a bit jealous of her dancing with other men, because he knew quite well that she would much rather be dancing with him; and she danced with him, of course, more than with all the others put together.

There were many people that evening who looked at and admired Dorrie; many women who envied Mrs. Bonham her daughter, many men who envied Len his bride. Georgina knew it, and Len knew it, and Monsieur and Madame and Mademoiselle knew it; but Dorrie knew nothing except that it was lovely to dance with Len, and that she was enjoying herself immensely.

It was only quite towards the end of the ball that Dorrie stopped enjoying herself. Then to-morrow, which was already indeed to-day, thrust in its importunate face and made Dorrie's face wistful.

"If only you weren't going, Len!"

"I shall come back—or rather you will come back. And then——"

"And then——"

"It will make up for everything," said Len.

"Yes," Dorrie whispered back, "for everything."

They stood in a little alcove by themselves, looking into each other's faces. Dorrie was above middle height, but Len was taller than she by a head, and while she looked up, he looked down. And looking down, he thought her just perfect. That was the picture of her he took away with him, that was how he always, in thinking of her, saw her: in her white dress, with the pinkest of soft pink cheeks, the most golden of hair the bluest of eyes: and in her eyes the love light.

They were wonderfully happy, looking through the glamour of love into the glory of being always together; and they thought themselves miserable because before the everlasting union there stood the dull months of parting. But they were far more happy than miserable.

Georgina, from without the alcove, caught sight of them, and was more convinced than ever that she was right about Germany.

"This sort of thing," she thought, "would be impossible without a break. And when we do get back to England there will be the trousseau to take up *some* of Dorrie's attention."

The next day Len went back to England, and a fortnight later Georgina and Dorrie set out on the way to Germany.

BOOK VI
GERMANY

CHAPTER I

DORRIE set out for Germany with an unwilling heart ; and after all, when at last she got there, she rather liked it. She liked it partly because it came at the end of her exile ; at any rate when she got as far as Germany she had not to go any farther ; whereas all the time she was in Belgium and Holland she was going farther and farther away from Len. Had she had an ounce of rebellion in her, she must have rebelled ; but there was nothing of the rebel in Dorrie. When she was not delighted—and her normal attitude was delight—she was pitiful ; but always—or so Georgina thought—sweet. And because she was so sweet, Georgina could not bear to see her pitiful. Rebellion she could have withstood, as the people of Stottleham, within and without her own set, knew. Dear Mrs. Bonham, it had often been remarked, would stand no nonsense. But pitifulness was another thing.

So when Dorrie said : " What a long way we're going, Mummy ! " Georgina felt for the moment as if she could hardly carry the trip through. And when Dorrie said : " It's such a long time, Mummy," she was weak enough (she told herself it was weakness) to shorten, on the spur of the moment, the period she had

intended to spend in Germany and to promise Dorrie that they would go back to England in June instead of July. But it was worth while to be weak, for Dorrie was so radiantly grateful and called her a heavenly Mum.

The shortening of the time, together with the fact that from Germany they were to go, except for a week in Paris, straight home, made Germany seem not dreadful after all. And then there were Lady Clementina's relations. For Lady Clementina, as Mrs. Bonham had been inclined to suppose, had German relations.

Len's grandfather's sister had married a German, and become a German baroness ; but though she was a German baroness she had remained extremely English, and the Baron had generally spoken English to her because she spoke German so badly. She had, however, a daughter and several sons, and they were all quite German like the Baron and not a bit English like the Baroness. The daughter, who was born a baroness, married a Graf and became a Gräfin ; and it was this Gräfin who caused Dorrie to like Germany. The Gräfin's brothers were all officers in the Prussian army, and since the Baroness's death Lady Clementina knew nothing about them : she said she really could not be bothered with Prussian officers. But the Gräfin and her husband had come to England and had been invited to Holt Hall ; and Lady Clementina had liked the Gräfin and continued to write to her after she returned to Germany. In one of her letters Lady Clementina had mentioned that Len's little *fiancée* was going to Germany ; and the Gräfin had answered the letter much sooner than she usually answered Lady Clementina's letters and said that she wished above

all things to see the bride, and would her dear cousin send her the bride's mother's address at once?

The Gräfin lived in a castle in Silesia, and Dorrie, when the invitation came to stay with the Graf and Gräfin, thought it would be lovely to stay in a castle. So did Georgina. And the castle—with the Count and Countess inside it—would serve as a variant to Holt Hall at the Stottleham tea-parties.

Dorrie would infinitely rather have had Len than the castle, but as she could not have Len—for the next month or two, and *had* to go to Germany—she thought the castle and the Gräfin and the Gräfin's two daughters, who were also Gräfins, would be much nicer than anything else. On the way she doubted, because the way was such a very long way; but when Mummy promised, faithfully promised, that she should see England—which of course meant Len—before the end of June, she felt ever so much better, and went to bed at Dresden with rather a headache but quite a light heart.

CHAPTER II

DORRIE went to bed as soon as she arrived at the hotel, for she had had a long day in the train and she did not like trains. So she had tea and a roll and butter and an egg brought up to her bedroom, and ate the egg and drank the tea while Augustine unpacked what was needed for the night.

Georgina was tired too, but she wanted her dinner, so she descended to the dining-room, where she had a little table to herself and half a bottle of white wine and tried all the dishes that were served at the table d'hôte. She missed Dorrie, but was quite comfortable

about her, and Georgina was never lonely at meals. She was not amongst the people who read at a solitary repast. "When I eat," she had remarked at a Guild Meeting, the question of meals having arisen, "I give my whole attention to my food. I consider it so much better for the digestion;" and the remark had been received with approval. It was so practical, quite in keeping with dear Mrs. Bonham's habitual good sense.

At the Dresden table d'hôte, Georgina was still dear Mrs. Bonham. Hers was a consciousness which was never merged in an outside atmosphere or affected by the consciousness of other personalities. As in England, so she was in Germany: the Mrs. Bonham who, in the drawing-room at the Beeches, consulted with Dr. Rayke, was changed no whit as she sat in the dining-room of the Dresden hotel and observed, between the courses, her fellow-diners.

The room was fairly full, and, to Georgina, the people who filled it looked all much alike. "Just all Germans," she said to herself. She thought them plain in appearance and she did not like the way they ate. "Some of the men," she wrote to Mrs. Vearing, "actually tucked their table napkins under their chins—like children with bibs. So ill-bred and un-English!"

The man at the table facing Georgina's table did this. He was the only man of his party, the four others being women. Jews, evidently, all of them, thought Georgina, who gave them her attention while she was waiting for the chicken and salad. No, she considered, after the chicken, there was one woman who might have been an ordinary Englishwoman; the word "ordinary" was praise from Georgina. And the man himself, with his abominable table napkin, he was not perhaps distinctively Jewish-looking after

all "when you looked into him." Georgina looked into him between the chicken and the ice pudding, and she came to the conclusion that he might almost be a Frenchman. The short dark beard, the olive skin, and the quick movements. . . . Then the ice pudding came, and Georgina proceeded to eat it.

After the ice and the grapes and the biscuits, Georgina interviewed Augustine, who, according to instructions, was waiting outside the dining-room door. Mees was in bed, reported Augustine, and fast asleep; nothing could be more satisfactory than the condition of Mees.

Georgina, therefore, went on to the drawing-room. She could not go to bed immediately after her dinner, and there *might* be an English paper. At any rate, as Dorrie did not want her, she would see, especially as, if she went upstairs, it was ten to one but she would find that Augustine had not taken out her patience cards.

CHAPTER III

THERE *was* an English paper, a copy of the "Times." It was nearly a week old, but Georgina seized upon it with avidity: it was delightful in Dresden to be able to read the "Times."

She read with joy the births, deaths and marriages; she skipped the leading articles, glanced at the correspondence and the police news and was proceeding to forthcoming marriages and recent engagements, when a most annoying and also quite painful thing happened. A fly or a gnat or a midge or a speck of dirt or one of her own eyelashes got into Georgina's left eye. Geor-

gina rubbed her eyelid, and it did no good : she took out her handkerchief and wiped away the gathering moisture, and it did no good : she twisted a corner of the handkerchief and tried to pass it between the upper and lower lids, and still it did no good.

Then she heard a voice.

" Pardon, Madame ! There is into your eye something entered. Not ? "

Georgina started, and with the one uninjured eye looked in the direction of the voice, which was, indeed, almost in front of her. And there, looking at her with keen dark eyes, was the man of the table napkin, who had faced her at table d'hôte.

Georgina hesitated. She had a hazy sense that some sort of introductory formula should have taken place or should take place now : her mental attitude would have been expressed by the words : I am Mrs. Bonham of Stottleham. Who are you ? though even in her mind she did not frame those words.

" I—I——" she began ; then the pain caused by the midge or the dust or the eyelash caused her to waive ceremony. " Yes, there is," she said.

" I am doctor," said the man. " Allow ! "

And before she could allow or disallow, he had turned back the upper lid of her eye and removed the cause of her discomfort.

Georgina blinked. The eye still smarted a little, and watered.

" It is all right. In a minute the pain is over."

The man smiled at her with a beneficent smile : Georgina, in the relief that she was now beginning to feel, smiled faintly back.

" Thank you so much," she said. " I'm sure I'm . . . it was most kind of you."

"Such small things occasion much suffering. It is nothing."

With a swift movement the benefactor drew a case from his pocket, took a card from the case and handed it to Georgina with a bow. He *had* a sense of the formalities then after all.

"I'm so sorry," said Georgina, "that I haven't a card down here. Perhaps in the morning . . ."

Her tone verged on cordiality; she had forgotten the table napkin.

"It makes nothing," said the man, and bowed.

"My name," said Georgina, "is Mrs. Bonham."

Again the man bowed. "It makes me pleasure to assist," he said, and turned away.

Georgina returned to the "Times," or tried to return, but the incident had diminished her interest in the recent engagements. Did all Germans, she asked herself, suddenly assist strangers? She tried to think how an English doctor would have behaved in the circumstances, but she could not recall any instance of having had a fly in her eye in the presence of an unknown doctor. Then she found herself wondering who this unknown—to her unknown—German doctor might be. She did not like to look at his card there, in the drawing-room; she must wait till she got upstairs. In the meantime she glanced every now and again towards that corner of the room where, talking to a little group of people, he paced up and down. He seemed to her like a man who never was, or could be, still. Georgina did not like restless people; she liked people to be quiet and not fidget. Nevertheless he had been very kind—very kind indeed, and but for his help . . . Perhaps he was an oculist . . . possibly well known . . . there were celebrated German oculists

. . . people went all the way to Germany to consult them . . . a man called Pargonsticker or something of the kind. It might be quite useful to have met him like this, supposing anything were to go wrong with her or Dorrie's eyes.

His name, however, was not written on his back, nor on his face, nor on his short black beard. She had to wait till she went upstairs to find out what it was. On the card was printed "Herr Dr. Reisen, Bahnstrasse, Laubach."

Was Reisen a well-known name? Georgina did not know. But then she did not know the names of any German doctors.

CHAPTER IV

IN the morning Dorrie's headache had as completely vanished as had on the previous evening the insect from Georgina's eye. Georgina told Dorrie about the German doctor, and Dorrie laughed.

"Oh, Mummy, how funny you must have looked! I wish I had been there to see."

It did not fit in with Mrs. Bonham's idea of herself to think that she might have looked funny. Had anyone but Dorrie suggested it, she would have resented the suggestion, but she rarely resented anything from Dorrie. Probably, too, the child was only in fun; and anyhow if she *had* looked funny, there was nobody but Germans to see her.

There was an immense deal to be seen in Dresden, according to Baedeker and also Murray, and apart from the guidance of Baedeker and Murray there was, as Georgina knew for herself, the Madonna. It would

never do, having been in Dresden, not to refer, in Stottleham, to the Dresden Madonna. The Madonna must be made sure of before they saw anything else. They set out therefore, soon after breakfast, to make sure of the Madonna.

Georgina before going downstairs put one of her visiting cards in her handbag. She had practically promised it in exchange for the card of Herr Dr. Reisen. But she did not see the doctor as she and Dorrie went out, nor when they returned, nor at the table d'hôte in the evening. He had, indeed, left with his party, by an early train that morning, as the waiter, on enquiry, informed her.

It was perhaps just as well, Georgina thought. He might have expected her and Dorrie to talk to him and his party in the drawing-room after dinner, and she did not care about talking to people in hotels. You never knew—and especially foreigners. Moreover these particular foreigners looked dowdy—the women at any rate. The doctor was not exactly dowdy, but—there was the table napkin, which had re-formed itself in Georgina's recollection. He had been very kind, and she was much obliged to him, but it was just as well.

Georgina and Dorrie stayed a week in Dresden, and saw a good deal besides the Madonna. But Dorrie begged that Mummy would not make her see *everything* in the guide-books. "Because the pictures get so jumbled, and there are such lots that are the same people over and over again."

Dorrie, in truth, much preferred the confectioners' shops to the galleries. She rather liked the opera, but not so much as the music at the cafés; and at the cafés you could have chocolate with whipped cream while the music was going on. If only Len had been

there to have chocolate too, and some of the delicious cakes that were served with it! She wrote him enormously long letters and told him everything they did, but the galleries were just mentioned in a sort of list, while the cafés were described in detail. And every letter ended up with a reference to the month of June. She longed for March to be over, because on the very first day of April she would be able to talk, not of a distant June, but of the month after next. The month after next made it seem very near. "It" was the meeting with Len.

CHAPTER V

It was the middle of March when Mrs. Bonham and Dorrie arrived at the Gräfin's, and the castle, Dorrie wrote to Len, was lovely. Georgina, writing to Mrs. Vearing, called it superb. It was right among the hills; the hills were clothed in forests, and some of the forests belonged to the Graf, for he had a very large estate.

"I feel," Georgina wrote to Mrs. Vearing, "as if I were back in feudal times. It is such a lordly kind of life."

Mrs. Vearing was used, at the Guild Meetings, to give tidings of Mrs. Bonham and report as to where she was and what she was doing; and the news spread at once from table to table that dear Mrs. Bonham was leading a lordly life. It was received with satisfaction; the lordliness of Mrs. Bonham reflected credit upon Stottleham. And Miss Truefitt did not sniff. All the sniff had been taken out of her by Dorrie's engagement.

The lordliness of Mrs. Bonham's life, however, lay chiefly in a certain etiquette and in the ideas of Mrs. Bonham; for the Graf and the Gräfin—and especially the Gräfin—were quite simple folk, and so were their children. There was Otto, who was twenty-one, and Emilie, who was nineteen, and Alma, who was seventeen. Otto was fair and so was Alma, and Emilie was dark; and all three immensely admired Dorrie, especially Otto. He was of course a count like his father, and Emilie and Alma were countesses; and this was one of the things that Georgina thought lordly.

Dorrie, being eighteen, was midway in age between Emilie and Alma, and both confided in her. Emilie had a romantic attachment, and Dorrie was moved to tears by the hopelessness and the pathos of Emilie's fate. *Der Adolf* was evidently one of the noblest and most charming of men, and it was heart-breaking to think that poverty and an inferior position forbade his union with Emilie.

Alma had no romantic attachment, but she hoped to have one: as yet she had come across no man sufficiently romantic to be attached to. Otto had had two, and had now, since Dorrie's arrival, formed a third. He, also, wished to confide in her, but Dorrie had no pity for Otto. When Otto fixed his blue eyes on her and sighed, Dorrie only laughed; "because," as she told Georgina, "he isn't really miserable a bit, and he only pretends to himself he's in love with me. The way he looks—it's quite, quite different from Len. I wonder if Daddy used to look at you, Mummy, the way Len looks at me."

"I daresay," said Georgina. She did not in fact remember how Theodore had looked at her before

they were married. She remembered Rayke's way of looking at her during the time he had sat on the fence that divided him from matrimony far better than any gaze or glance of Theodore's. But she could not, of course, reveal the romance which her prudence had stultified to Dorrie.

She missed Rayke, during this time abroad, more than anybody. Mrs. Vearing—yes, she missed Mrs. Vearing, but nothing like so much as she missed Rayke. Alicia was a sort of satellite, whereas Rayke, with his wisdom and sympathy, was a sort of sun; and while she missed the circling of the satellite, she missed still more the illumination of the sun. He wrote her nice letters and she wrote equally nice letters to him; but she missed the constant consultations and the asking and giving of advice. Advice by post was not the same thing; it took so long in coming and she could not explain the little ins and outs of difficulties in a letter. Rayke had always understood so much that she left unsaid, but if she left things unsaid in writing, he did not understand at all. It would be very nice, she thought, to be back at the Beeches with Rayke coming to tea.

CHAPTER VI

IN the meantime Georgina made the most of the castle, with its counts and countesses and its lordly life; and Dorrie, striking off daily in her almanac one of the days that still divided her from Len, made the most of it too. And Dorrie's most was a good deal, because she was young and well and eager of

enjoyment, and was amused by all the sights and ways that were different from what she had known in England.

There were continual expeditions to points of interest or beauty, and at every point there was a restaurant where they had coffee or beer or milk and always cakes. Georgina had a distinct liking for German beer, but Dorrie made faces whenever she tasted it, and Otto made her very angry, or as nearly very angry as she could be made, by saying that her dislike was affectation. Then, when he had made her angry, he begged her to forgive him and said if she would only be kind to him he would never tease her again.

There were always Jews wherever they went, and the Graf and the Gräfin dislikd the Jews as much as Dorrie dislikd the beer. And sometimes there were Polish Jews who wore long gaberdines and earlocks, and amazed and amused Dorrie by their appearance, and who seemed to be held in as much contempt by the German Jews as were the German Jews by the Germans who were not Jews.

Georgina and Dorrie both wrote accounts of the expeditions. Georgina's accounts were circulated throughout Stottleham and interested the people in all the different sets; but Dorrie's accounts got no further than Len, and indeed in Dorrie's accounts there was very little of general interest.

It was lovely spring weather, and they all enjoyed the expeditions. The Graf and the Gräfin said it was so delightful to show their dear English friends the beauties and customs of the Fatherland; and Georgina said it was so interesting and instructive, and Dorrie said it was so funny, to see how things were

done in Germany. There were only two expeditions which were not completely successful. The first was spoiled by Georgina having a headache, which became a very bad headache before they got back to the castle; and the other expedition was the one during which Dorrie had her accident. But this one was not very much spoiled, not nearly so much as was the expedition of Georgina's headache, since Dorrie's accident, as Dorrie said, was such a tiny one.

She slipped on a path slippery with pine-needles and fell, and at the spot where she fell there was the remains of a broken bottle, cast away by a last year's picnicker (the Grafs and the Gräfin said of course he was a Jew) and partially embedded in the soil. It was sharp enough and strong enough to cut through the side of Dorrie's shoe and graze her foot. It was not much more than a graze, but it bled a little; and Emilie, who could not stand the sight of blood, almost fainted, and Otto thundered against the rascally Jew whose fault it was, and the Gräfin proposed all sorts of remedies, and Georgina, who always carried two handkerchiefs, produced a clean one to bind up the wound, and everybody talked at once.

The only one who did not talk was Dorrie. Dorrie only laughed, and when they allowed her to answer some of the questions they volleyed forth, she said it did not hurt at all or hardly at all, and she did not feel a bit sick or shaken, thank you, nor at all frightened, and that it was ever so much better than if she had sprained her ankle.

"The villain!" said Otto. "To break a bottle and throw it where a lady might fall."

"I hope," said Dorrie, "that he had drunk the beer, poor fellow, before he broke the bottle."

Whereupon the papa Graf said that she had a noble character.

Otto wanted to carry her, but Dorrie resolutely refused to be carried. If it had been Len . . . But it was not Len, and she did not say to Otto what might have happened if he had been Len. She took Georgina's arm as far as the carriage, but she hardly limped at all, and by the time they got back to the castle the wound had stopped bleeding altogether.

By that time, too, everybody's excitement had subsided, and it seemed to them all somewhat absurd that Augustine should a little lose her head when she heard that Mees had had an accident.

"And I said only a *slight* accident," Georgina explained.

"But Augustine's always losing her head, Mummy," said Dorrie, "so it's only likely she would when everybody else did."

"I didn't lose my head."

"You never do, do you, Mummy? But all the rest did. That's what made me laugh. Especially Otto."

"Poor Otto, I fear, has lost his heart."

"Oh no, he hasn't. It's only because he thinks he ought to. He likes me, of course, but it's because I'm pretty."

"But, darling"—Georgina was a little shocked—"do you *think* you're pretty? People don't generally . . ."

"I must be," interrupted Dorrie, "because Len says so."

"Really, Dorrie——"

"And I think so too, rather, of my own accord. I can't help it, Mummy, especially in *some* of my hats."

"When I was a girl," said Georgina, "I never heard girls talk as you talk."

"Didn't you? I wonder, when I have a daughter——"

"Really, Dorrie, it's hardly . . . To talk of having children before . . ."

"But *of course* I shall have children. You had a daughter, Mummy, so why shouldn't I?"

CHAPTER VII

AUGUSTINE had been getting on quite satisfactorily in regard to German; it seemed to Georgina that she had managed everything very well during the travelling. She had accomplished the ticket-taking without a hitch, and appeared to have no difficulties at the hotels. Georgina did not realize that at every hotel most of the servants spoke French as well as English, and she was reassured as to Augustine's command of the German tongue. Moreover, Augustine had improved very much in her English, so that there was now no difficulty in communicating with her, and being satisfied in respect of her English, Mrs. Bonham was disposed to be satisfied also in respect of her German. Augustine herself was quite satisfied too.

Augustine thoroughly enjoyed herself at the castle; it was the kind of life, she told Dorrie, that she did enjoy; and she became as nearly depressed as it seemed possible for her to be, when the time drew near for leaving it.

It seemed extraordinary to Dorrie that Augustine should be depressed. Of course in a way it was all

right. Dorrie too—in a way—was sorry to go; sorry to leave the kind Graf and Gräfin and Emilie and Alma and Otto—even Otto. But when they left the castle their faces would be set towards England, west instead of east, and surely to go back to England . . . Only of course, Dorrie reminded herself, everybody could not be engaged to Len. Augustine certainly could not. The thought amused her and made it more difficult than ever to look as sorrowful as she felt she ought to look in response to the melancholy aspect of Emilie, Alma and Otto.

The only thing that was rather tiresome was that the little wound on her foot had not properly healed. The Graf thought some dirt must have got into it; the Gräfin thought it was the dye from the stocking; Georgina did not know what to think; and as for Dorrie, all she thought about it was that it was annoying because people made such a fuss.

"I think," said the Graf to Georgina, "that you should let a doctor see the foot as soon as you get to a town."

"I will," said Georgina, "most certainly. Laubach is our first stopping-place, and . . ."

Suddenly she remembered Dresden and the fly in her eye and the doctor who had been so kind. She had not thought either of the fly or the doctor since she had been at the castle. And now she could not remember his name, but she thought—she was almost sure—that Laubach was the name of the place on the card he had given her.

The next time she went upstairs she looked for the card and found it and brought it downstairs to show the Gräfin.

"The Herr Professor Reisen was it who came to

your assistance?" exclaimed the Gräfin. "I know the name very well, and indeed I know—a little—the man. He is a Jew"—the Gräfin shrugged her shoulders—"but he is so celebrated that one has to forget it. Everywhere in Europe—I daresay you have heard of him, my dear Mrs. Bonham, as a professor, a scientist . . ."

"I may have heard the name," said Georgina, but she felt quite sure she never had. She added: "My friend, Dr. Rayke, I daresay would know him."

"Without doubt. And you could not consult a better man. He is a skin specialist—"

"But this wound has nothing to do with the skin," said Georgina quickly. Dorrie's skin was perfect, she said to herself.

"No, of course not." The Gräfin hastened to remove the imputation she appeared to have cast on Dorrie's skin. "Oh no. Your Dorrie has such a beautiful complexion. Still, he is clever—so clever in every way. I will write you a little letter of introduction."

"It's most kind, but I need not trouble you. I have my introduction." And Georgina pointed to the card. "I am sure he will remember me." Dear Mrs. Bonham was not used to being forgotten.

The Gräfin agreed; the card was quite enough. Still, she had to write to the Professor in any case, about a poor girl in whom she was interested and whom she wanted him to treat in his clinic: she would mention Mrs. Bonham and her daughter at the same time. It could do no harm, said the Gräfin.

The Gräfin having agreed with Georgina, Georgina now agreed with the Gräfin. The card, to be sure, was an introduction, a fully sufficient introduction,

connected as it was with the incident of the fly; but it could do no harm to be known as a friend of the Gräfin's; on the contrary a friend of the Gräfin's would certainly be received with a greater enthusiasm and deference than an hotel acquaintance from whose eye the professor had removed an insect. Georgina therefore agreed to the Gräfin's proposal, and graced her thanks with a measure of effusiveness.

Dorrie, who usually objected to seeing doctors, said she would go and see any doctor Mummy liked, if it would make people stop worrying about her foot. And the doctor who had been so kind to Mummy would be much the nicest doctor to see.

CHAPTER VIII

GEORGINA and Dorrie, when they got to Laubach, thought it very dull. The Gräfin had recommended an hotel in a quiet part of the town, in the Catholic quarter, for the Jewish quarter, she said, was reeking with Jews; moreover it was very noisy, not only because there were a great many Jews, but because there were also a great many cobblestones. The cobblestones seemed to be everywhere, but very few vehicles passed over them in the street where was the hotel recommended by the Gräfin, and it was very quiet, and quite Jewless and—so Georgina and Dorrie thought—quite uninteresting. Augustine thought so too.

Dorrie and Augustine went out after they had all had some tea and some little rolls shaped like buns, to see if they could find shops and restaurants with bands. Georgina was tired and preferred to lie down

in her bedroom; besides, she owed letters to both Mrs. Vearing and Dr. Rayke and wanted to clear off her debt.

"I wish, Mummy," said Dorrie when she came back, "that we had gone to an hotel amongst the nice horrid Jews."

"I don't know why you call them nice, darling. After all we heard at the castle. . . . Besides, they can't be nice if they are horrid."

"I suppose they're horrid, because the Gräfin and all said they were. But I think they're rather nice,—more amusing than other Germans, and very kind if you ask the way."

"Did you ask the way? Where to? Where did you go to?"

"We asked the way to the hotel, because—it was such fun, Mummy—we lost ourselves. We went ever so far away—well, not ever so far, but pretty far, and we got right amongst the Jews and the shops and the bustle—much more amusing than it is round about here. And of course we thought we knew the way back, and then we didn't."

"You should have looked at the map. I don't know whether there's any sort of map of Laubach in Baedeker, but I am sure I saw maps and local guide-books for sale in the bureau."

"We did buy a guide-book and there was a map in it, but you can't study a map when you're walking along, can you, Mummy?"

"I should have studied it before I started," said Georgina. She rather prided herself on finding her way about. She had found it with almost no difficulty at all to the Dresden Madonna.

"I suppose we ought to have, but we were so

anxious to start. But Augustine says she is going to study it this evening. We kept saying 'Bitte, Schwarzerhof' all the way along, and the Jews—for they all seemed Jews—were very kind, and one sort of passed us on to another."

"I hope you didn't make your foot worse, wandering about like that."

"It didn't hurt hardly at all, only because the stocking rubs it. It's ever so much better. I don't see why I really should go and see the doctor at all."

"It will be better to see him, darling, because it might get worse later on at some place where we don't know any doctor. And besides, you know, the Countess has written to him and he will be expecting you."

"I'm sure he wouldn't mind. One foot can't make any difference to him."

"Perhaps not; but the Countess might mind after taking the trouble to write. And besides, it's safer. I should feel more comfortable. We'll go in the morning; and if he says it's all right, we might—well, we might move on the next day."

"Or even to-morrow afternoon," Dorrie suggested.

Georgina reflected. There was the packing and . . . but Augustine . . . it would not take long. And Laubach was dreadfully dull.

"Or even to-morrow afternoon," she agreed.

CHAPTER IX

BUT to-morrow morning and to-morrow afternoon Georgina was in bed with a headache. She said it was a nervous headache, but Dorrie and Augustine thought

it was bilious, though Dorrie did not say so to Augustine, nor did Augustine say so to Dorrie. Dorrie did not think that the German beer had agreed with Mummy, for Mummy had headaches much oftener in Germany than she had in England or even in France: but Georgina would not admit beer as a factor any more than she would admit bile. The idea of Mrs. Bonham of the Beeches being upset by beer! Her headaches were due to over-fatigue, and though she felt far too wretched to argue the point, or any point, on that Tuesday morning, she most certainly would have argued it with marked displeasure when she got better. And Dorrie, knowing this, left the point unraised.

The tiresome thing was that Georgina could not take Dorrie to the doctor, and they would have to wait at least an extra day, and perhaps two, in the depressing superior quarter of Laubach. Dorrie said she felt sure Mummy would be ever so much better when she had left Laubach: it was enough to give *anybody* a headache to be in Laubach. If Mummy wasn't better by the afternoon, she would go to the doctor's with Augustine, if she *had* to go. Augustine had been studying the map, and knew exactly where the Bahnstrasse was and how to get there, and if Mummy could be left . . .

Mummy felt that to be left would be bliss compared with being argued with or persuaded or entreated or indeed talked to at all. If Dorrie wanted to go with Augustine, let her go. She had meant and wanted to take her herself, but if Dorrie persisted . . . argument with her head in its present condition was impossible. . . .

"Do as you like," said Georgina.

So when the afternoon came, and poor Mummy could not look at food, Dorrie put eau-de-Cologne on the little table by her bed and kissed her and drew the curtains and tiptoed out of the room. She herself did not know what it was to have more than the slightest of headaches, but she was dreadfully sorry for Mummy, and she summoned the chambermaid and told her all that she was to do and all that she was not to do, and then she summoned Augustine.

It was a horrid afternoon, Dorrie wrote to Len, which was rather a good thing in a way, because in horrid weather, when you couldn't see anything else, you might as well see a doctor.

As it happened, they saw a great deal besides the doctor, a great deal which they had not intended to see. Dorrie called it her mistakes and accidents day, because it was full of both. In the first place, when, not far from the hotel, they came to a church, Dorrie insisted upon going in, because, as she said, she liked to smell the incense and she wanted to see the dear little acolytes. There was no service going on, and there were no acolytes, and she soon had enough of the incense. That could not be called either a mistake or an accident, but later on, when Augustine lost her way, she declared that she had been put out of her bearings by going into the church.

"Ridiculous, wasn't it?" said Dorrie in a letter to Len. "But Augustine is no good with a map."

"Then," the letter went on, "we got down into the Jewish quarter again where we had been the day before, and into a wide street full of bustle and Jews, and Augustine kept asking the way, and people kept telling her, and she kept on losing it again, and then it began to rain. I had an umbrella, but Augustine

hadn't, and I held mine over us both and we both got wet. Two people always do if there's only one umbrella, don't you think so? It would really have been much better if *one* of us had kept dry, but that would have had to be me, and I felt so sorry for Augustine, because her front hair came out of curl and she looked so funny and flurried, and I don't think she knows German as well as she thinks she does. Then the streets got very muddy and wet, and you know how horrid it is when your skirt gets muddy and flops against your ankles—oh no, of course you don't. How funny you would look in a skirt, Len darling! Well, mine got wet, and so did Augustine's, and then when we were crossing the road we nearly got run over, and Augustine screamed, and I gave a jump, and I jumped into a puddle. We were both splashed, and my hat fell off, and oh the poor feather! I said then I thought we had better go home—to the hotel, I mean, but Augustine thought that Madame, as she calls Mummy, would be angry if I hadn't been to the doctor's, and of course I didn't want Augustine to get into a row.

"Well, we did get there at last, because we took a cab, and Augustine was rather cross because I laughed at her in the cab. But how could I help it? for generally she looks quite smart, and she looked so draggled and funny. What *I* must have looked like, I can't imagine. I am sure you would have cut me dead (but I don't *really* think you would). But I was afraid the doctor would be horrified. Only he wasn't in when we got to his house in the cab, and they sent us to his clinic, and he wasn't there either, only a sort of assistant or something. But Augustine explained and said about the Gräfin writing, and he

said it was all right. Only what I did hate, though it does not matter now, as it's all over, but I did hate . . .

"Augustine's come in and the bus is waiting to go to the station and I can't—till to-morrow."

CHAPTER X

WHAT Dorrie hated, and what Georgina hated, and what the Herr Professor hated too when he realized what had happened, was that Dorrie, instead of having a consultation with the doctor at the doctor's house, had been received into his clinic.

The doctor did not realize the mistake that had been made till the following afternoon. Nor did Mrs. Bonham.

Georgina, in the dozing discomfort which succeeded the more acute stage of her suffering, did not discover Dorrie's absence till Dorrie's bedtime. Then her alarm—for surely there must be something very much wrong with the foot—was only equalled by her anger. The anger was directed against Augustine because there was, at the moment, nobody else against whom to direct it. Augustine must have been stupid; it must have been Augustine's fault. Augustine was dispatched at once to bring back Dorrie or at least news of her.

Augustine brought back neither.

"Everything was shut," she announced with tears of terror; for Augustine, always in awe of Madame, was now overwhelmed by Madame's displeasure.

The next morning Augustine was dispatched anew,

after Georgina had got up, dressed, and then been obliged to lie down on the sofa ; and again Augustine returned without Dorrie and without news that could be called news.

" It was all r-right. Mees was to stay. They said it was all r-right."

The roll of Augustine's r's, the inability of Augustine to explain why it was all right, got on Georgina's nerves. It was impossible to do anything with a creature so incapable.

Early in the afternoon, shaken and still a little sick, but stimulated by alarm and upheld by annoyance, Mrs. Bonham went in a cab to the flat in which resided Herr Reisen.

The doctor remembered her at once. Of course. Mrs. Bonham had taken it for granted that he would. And he was very kind and very polite ; but it was obvious that he had not an idea why she had come.

Perceiving that he did not understand the object of her visit, Mrs. Bonham stared at him.

" You don't know—— ? "

" I await you shall tell me."

Georgina told him.

As she told him, the Professor got up from his chair and walked up and down the room as he had done in the drawing-room of the hotel at Dresden. And then, as Mrs. Bonham realized that Dorrie was not in Herr Reisen's flat, Herr Reisen realized that it was Miss Bonham who had been received the morning before into his clinic.

Mrs. Bonham, in all her life, had never been so angry or so agitated as when she realized where Dorrie was. A common clinic . . . with common people. That it was the Professor's own clinic gave it, in that

moment, no touch of redemption. No matter whether well-to-do patients were received in it or no ; it was for all sorts of people—people who . . . low-class people like the Countess's protégée . . . the wretched, confusing, mischief-making protégée.

In that hour Georgina almost hated the Countess. It was all her fault with her idiotic officious letter. If she had only left Georgina to manage her own business ! Her daughter, Mrs. Bonham's daughter, treated like . . . Through Georgina's indignation ran a resolve : it must never be known in Stottleham. Not even to Alicia Vearing, not even . . . Rayke, would she disclose it—at any rate not in writing. Perhaps later on—much later—when it was all long past and over, at tea some day . . . And Dorrie—it must be represented to Dorrie that . . . Dorrie was so apt to treat things as jokes and be amused when— She might even be amused at this.

The only comfort was that the Professor was fully as much upset as was Mrs. Bonham ; or even more upset. As he walked up and down the room, there could be no doubt about his being upset. The disaster, the terrible disaster—thus he characterized it—of Dorrie having been mistaken for the Countess's ignoble protégée caused him to break from his careful English into words which, incomprehensible to Georgina, sounded to her like a concentrated essence of blasphemy.

She disapproved of swearing and even of strong language ; but the occasion justified unusual vehemence : she could not but be gratified by the Professor's guttural distress and was even a little soothed by it. He saw the enormity then of what had occurred. That was something.

It was also something that Dorrie's detention was not due to the state of her foot, that there was nothing terribly the matter, or indeed much the matter at all, with her foot. Not that Georgina had thought there was; nevertheless it was satisfactory to have the Professor's emphatic assurance.

"The foot," said Dr. Reisen, "is nothing. It will in a couple of days be healed: almost it is healed now. The foot is nothing. It is the confusion, the mistake, the . . . If but even only this morning I had known . . . if but since two, three hours . . . No, no, not the foot it is. . . . The foot is nothing."

Yet, having stated that there was nothing the matter with Dorrie's foot, Herr Reisen had what Georgina called the impertinence to suggest that Miss Bonham should remain a week or two in Laubach in order to undergo treatment.

"Treatment!" said Mrs. Bonham. "And, pray, what for?" If there was nothing the matter with Miss Bonham's foot, she asked the Professor, why should Miss Bonham have treatment?

The Professor, answering, was not very coherent.

"The general health of the young lady is — is . . . To counteract — prevent . . . there is a tendency . . ."

"I know of no tendency in my daughter's health," said Mrs. Bonham, getting up, "which requires treatment at Laubach. There are no tendencies in the health of my family which require counteraction or treatment at all. Miss Bonham's family on both sides is perfectly sound, and her general health is excellent. We leave Laubach," said Mrs. Bonham, looking at Herr Reisen as she looked at members of the second set in Stottleham when they claimed

acquaintance with her outside second-set precincts, "to-morrow morning."

She bowed and Herr Reisen bowed. After the bow he opened his mouth, but, looking at Mrs. Bonham's face, he did not speak: instead of speaking he shrugged his shoulders.

CHAPTER XI

BUT for Dorrie, Georgina would have dismissed Augustine on the spot. For it was even more Augustine's fault than the Countess's. Had it not been for Augustine's stupidity, the Countess might have committed no fault at all. It was Augustine who had muddled everything, with her lack of sense and of German. Georgina had lost all faith in Augustine's German. She was sure, she said to Dorrie—and also to Augustine—that it was even worse than her English had been when she first became maid to Georgina.

And Augustine, when she was not calling upon her God, accepted all Madame's reproaches in tears and speechlessness. For there was nothing to be said. What could she say? Muddle? confusion? Who save herself could know how confused and muddled she had been? And as for her German—who better than Augustine could know how bad it was? At the hotels her German had seemed to her very good, but at the hotels everybody—everybody that mattered—spoke French. But at the clinic! If only at the clinic there had been somebody intelligent enough to speak French! Augustine felt that in being confronted at the clinic with a person who spoke no French,

who did not understand her German and whose German she did not understand, she had been, by far, abominably badly used. But of what use to point that out to Madame? especially as explanations in English were at all times difficult. Mees was different. Mees spoke French, Mees was understanding, Mees had sympathy.

It was Mees who came to the rescue.

"I know she muddled, Mummy, but German's a dreadful language to understand; and it was partly my fault for jumping into a puddle; and then what with the rain—and altogether . . . If you had seen us, Mummy, and hadn't known I was me, you might have thought we were—well, anything."

"I really cannot overlook it, Dorrie: it was inexcusable. To profess to know German thoroughly! And then not to come straight and tell me! I really cannot."

But Dorrie continued to plead, and Dorrie, as usually happened, in the end got her way. It took her some time, for Georgina, when she heard of Dorrie's experiences in the clinic, was more bitter against Augustine than before. To think of Dorrie being shut all night in a ward with other girls—common girls! It was unspeakable; and most certainly must never be spoken of in Stottleham; on that point she was more firmly resolved than ever before. Suppose that Lady Clementina were to hear of it! That Dorrie while in the clinic had been inoculated, though to Dorrie it was the chief grievance of her detention, was to Georgina a minor matter. Inoculation was perfectly respectable, even fashionable, and the little mark on Dorrie's arm caused by the injection would soon pass away. It was the company she had been

in that was so objectionable ; and the fact that she had actually been mistaken for a girl of the peasant class was to Georgina gall and wormwood. It was this that made Augustine's crime almost unforgivable, and would have placed it beyond the possibility of pardon, save for one mitigating fact, namely Augustine's acceptance of the position of criminal. At least, said Georgina, she acknowledged her fault ; and the acknowledgment a little weighed down the scale of Dorrie's pleading.

Augustine accepted the position because there was no other position to accept. She felt that fate had made her, to a certain extent, the scapegoat of a concatenation of circumstance, that though it had been her fault, it had not been all her fault ; yet that still in some measure her fault it had been. It had been, for instance, partly her fault that Mees had been left at the clinic ; and when she was made to realize, as she was on the evening of Mees's return, how terrible it was, or might have been, for Mees, she felt that no position assigned to her could be too abject.

So Augustine took the position of criminal, and Dorrie took the position of advocate, and Georgina, having taken the position of judge, was induced at the last to recommend the criminal for mercy. And thus they all three left Laubach together.

BOOK VII
AUGUSTINE

CHAPTER I

GEORGINA in France, and even more in Germany, missed Mrs. Vearing and Dr. Rayke and Stottleham, but not so much as Mrs. Vearing missed dearest Georgina, as Dr. Rayke missed his intelligent friend, or as Stottleham missed dear Mrs. Bonham.

The Guild meetings had lost much of their savour ; Mrs. Bonham, with her nice clothes, her nice ideas, and her bows, smiles and handshakes nicely graduated according to the different sets, had been—not its central interest, for the work of course was that, but its chief inspiration. Mrs. Vearing—yes, Mrs. Vearing was nice too, and very kind, and more approachable than Mrs. Bonham ; Miss Truefitt preferred her ; but Mrs. Bonham's very unapproachableness invested her with interest, for there was always the question, not to say the excitement, of seeing how far she could be approached, and whether, out of her own set, some would approach her more nearly than others. Mrs. Vearing, her satellite—though as far as position, Miss Truefitt said, above her—had always been as a charming moon to Mrs. Bonham's sun, and was charming still ; but in Mrs. Bonham's absence she seemed a moon that was always in a waxing crescent or a waning bow, and never at the full.

THE THUNDERBOLT

Yet it was from Mrs. Vearing alone that news was given of dear Mrs. Bonham to all the sets in Stottleham. Throughout the winter the news was communicated to the Guild; and when, in the spring, the Guild meetings ceased, it was given out at tea-table in the best set, and during parochial calls in the others.

Mrs. Ludovic Pottlebury was much in request at this time in the second set, for Mrs. Vearing told a many details to Patricia in the course of confidential teas at the Vicarage or over the Bank as she communicated at social teas to the church set; and the more detailed the account of Mrs. Bonham and her doings, the deeper the interest in all the sets. So, first through Mrs. Vearing, then through Patricia, and then through divers newsmongers, the outstanding events of dear Mrs. Bonham's sojourn on the Continent (for thus Georgina's absence was frequently described) and some of the lesser ones were made known to Stottleham.

Thus it was that, when Len ran over to Paris, Stottleham was aware of it.

"Mr. Fortescue is in Paris, with Mrs. and Miss Bonham. Did you know?"

"I heard they expected him. By the night boat, I believe, last Friday."

"Oh no; he left Charing Cross early on Saturday morning."

"Charing Cross? I understood he had gone by the Dieppe route from Victoria."

"I think not. Mrs. Pottlebury, I am sure, said Dover and Calais."

Mrs. Pottlebury was constantly brought in to clinch the argument, and there were many arguments to be clinched. They increased, in fervour and in

points of difference, when Georgina and Dorrie left France for Germany. The station from which they had started, the route they followed, the towns they stopped at ; all these were food for discussion, and all these, sometimes quite hotly, were discussed.

The incident of the fly in Mrs. Bonham's eye was told only to a few ; but it leaked out and spread like wildfire, its final version being that dear Mrs. Bonham had had a serious accident, that both her eyes were injured, and that an operation had been performed at an hotel. When Mrs. Vearing heard of this version, she sent round Patricia Pottlebury as a sort of walking official bulletin to give the true statement of the case. Patricia, during the Bonhams' travels, was often an official bulletin, when she was not an extra special news-sheet.

She was an extra special—outside the church set—in connection with the lordly life at the Castle. She knew the very latest happenings in that life ; the last strange German dish that Mrs. Bonham had had for lunch, and the most recent expedition which had been enjoyed by Mrs. Bonham, Miss Bonham, the two Grafs and the three Gräfins. Stottleham was much impressed by the three Gräfins, more so than by the two Grafs.

Dorrie occasionally wrote to Patricia, but Dorrie wrote such long letters to Len, that she had not much time to write to anybody else. and it was through Mrs. Vearing that Patricia—and after Patricia, Stottleham—learned that Dorrie had cut her foot. It was cut to the bone before the news reached the outer fringe, and much sympathy was expressed with poor Mrs. Bonham because her sweet daughter had nearly bled to death. And she engaged too ! Poor young Mr. Fortescue !

Stottleham heard of the healing of the foot, but it had no slightest hint of the clinic: it did not even know that Dorrie, at Laubach, had seen a doctor. Georgina, in mentioning the couple of days' stay at Laubach, did not mention the doctor any more than she mentioned the clinic. There were several things which, in her letters to Mrs. Vearing and to Rayke, she did not mention; as, for instance, that she liked the German beer, and that Augustine, as a travelling maid, was not the success she had anticipated.

But Stottleham could not complain; nor did it: it was ignorant of its own ignorance and rejoiced in a knowledge which it held to be complete.

"Of course," said Mrs. Vearing, "when dear Mrs. Bonham returns, she will be able to tell us all sorts of delightful anecdotes which she has not time or space for in her letters. And darling Dorrie too. I shall give a special tea-party to welcome them back and hear their impressions."

"I hope Miss Bonham has quite got over her accident," said Mrs. Charles Marden.

Mrs. Saunders-Parr answered her.

"Oh, quite. I heard from my sister-in-law—Len's mother—yesterday, and she said they wrote the wound had healed soon after they left the von Holsigers, and that must be more than three weeks ago."

"Yes, it's about a month," said Gwendolen Saunders-Parr, "for the last letter I had from Dorrie was written a month ago—just after they left Laubach, and they stayed a day or two at Laubach after leaving the Castle."

"It did quite heal," said Mrs. Vearing, "but I heard from Georgina Bonham this morning, and she

says she is sure that the poison or whatever got into it is not yet out of her system."

"They thought some dirt got in, didn't they?" asked Miss Chauncey.

"Yes, or a little dye from the stocking. At first they were afraid it might be troublesome, but it was all right—Dorrie is so healthy, you know—and it healed perfectly, Mrs. Bonham wrote."

"Then what has happened," asked Mrs. Marsden, "to make Mrs. Bonham think—I hope it hasn't opened again. I always think it's a bad sign if a wound opens again after it has healed."

"No, it isn't that; it was such a small affair I don't think it would be likely to, after once healing up. But Dorrie seems out of sorts and so Mrs. Bonham feels sure there must have been some sort of poison and that it got into her blood."

"Being out of sorts," said Mrs. Saunders-Parr "might come from anything."

"It might have nothing to do with the wound at all," added Miss Chauncey.

"Only it happens to have come on after she had the wound and not before," said Mrs. Vearing. Her tone was—for Mrs. Vearing—tart. If Georgina Bonham thought that Dorrie's indisposition was connected with the cut on her foot, connected with the cut the indisposition must be. Surely dearest Georgina, who was on the spot, knew better what she was talking about than did people who had not seen Dorrie for months.

Miss Chauncey, however, was not to be put down; she was moreover supported by Mrs. Saunders-Parr; and the two narrated instance after instance of illnesses which had nothing to do with wounds.

Mrs. Vearing was nettled, but she had no power to sting. She never could sting, nor could she argue; and she knew that if she tried to prove her point in words, the words would not come right and the point would go astray. If Georgina herself had been there! Then indeed those who thought they knew better than she did would have received a merited snub. But dearest Georgina, alas, was not there, and Mrs. Vearing, unable to snub on her behalf, was reduced to being herself almost snubbed. All she could do was, as quickly as possible, to change the subject, and to turn it altogether away from Mrs. Bonham. At any rate, if they scouted Georgina's opinions, they should hear no more of her doings. It was Mrs. Vearing's only possible retaliation and she adopted and stuck to it. She parried with cold courtesy any further enquiries concerning dear Mrs. Bonham.

CHAPTER II

GEORGINA, meanwhile, was convinced that the German food did not agree with Dorrie.

She and Dorrie and the forgiven Augustine were at Frankfort when she wrote and told Mrs. Vearing about the indisposition which had created almost a breach of the peace in the Vicarage drawing-room. In that same letter Georgina had spoken of the Palm Gardens, and the promenades round the town, and the beautiful woods in the neighbourhood, and the excellence of the hotel; also of a tendency showing itself in Augustine to be hysterical. All this would have immensely interested Georgina's set, and all this would

have been communicated to it, had not certain members of that set taken upon themselves to question Mrs. Bonham's diagnosis of the condition of Dorrie's health.

But Georgina, mentioning so much, had not mentioned certain symptoms which secretly but considerably troubled her. One was that Dorrie's inoculated arm had not healed satisfactorily; there was inflammation and what Georgina called a sort of sore where there should have been soft white skin. The other was that a sore place had appeared on Dorrie's lip. All this pointed, in Georgina's opinion, to something wrong with the blood, and was the more disturbing inasmuch as Dorrie had never had anything of the kind before. That the German food had much to do with her condition Georgina had no doubt, but she was convinced also that the wound in her foot had been poisoned, and, convinced therefore that Dr. Reisen's diagnosis had been wrong, she was more angry with him than ever. His stupidity and incompetency were unequalled. No wonder he had muddled Dorrie's identity, when he had proved himself quite incapable of dealing with her foot.

It would have been a relief to Georgina to speak of Dorrie's symptoms and her own disquietude to Mrs. Vearing, but she had refrained from doing so because Dorrie was so upset about her arm and lip and had asked her not to say anything about them.

Dorrie did not care about her arm—comparatively speaking. She had cared at first, because she was used to a perfectly clear and healthy skin; but compared with her lip—her face, it didn't matter at all: when her lip became what she called disgusting the arm sank into insignificance. Her arm—all day at

any rate—was covered; nobody could see it: she need hardly see it herself. But her lip! If it should not be all right by the time that she saw Len! And the time for seeing Len was drawing near.

How she looked forward to that time! And now it was shadowed; and by such a little thing. But the little thing meant much to Dorrie, to whom it seemed that any shortcoming in Len's bride was of the nature of a wrong done to Len.

Georgina laughed at her and told her that she was absurdly vain; and reproved her seriously, saying that it was quite wrong and irreligious to care so much what she looked like. And Augustine assured her in a torrent of words—for Augustine in her own language was voluble—that her lip would be as pretty as ever it had been long before she got back to England.

But Dorrie, in spite of Mummy and in spite of Augustine, was greatly upset. And she did not want Len even to know. To be sure he had said he would love her just the same if she were as ugly as sin, and she knew he would; but she did not want to be ugly, and to Dorrie the smallest blemish was ugliness.

Augustine was invariably sympathetic when Dorrie spoke of what she called her ugliness, but Georgina at last became angry—as angry as it was possible for her to be where Dorrie was concerned.

"I told you," she said, "that it was wrong to think so much about your appearance, and it's quite as wrong to talk about being ugly—and as absurd—as about being pretty."

"It isn't so much for myself—though it's horrid to be hideous—it's for Len. I wanted to be as pretty as I could for his sake."

"Len will do very well."

"It's meeting him again, Mummy, after all this time when I did so want to look nice."

"Really, Dorrie," Georgina exclaimed, "you put me out of patience. After all, what is it? A mere nothing, the result of this horrid foreign food; and it'll be all right as soon as you get back to England and have proper wholesome things to eat."

"You think so, Mummy?"

"Of course I think so. What else should I think? It's quite wicked to make the fuss you do. Have you used that ointment?"

"Yes, but it's no good."

"And vaseline? I've often——"

"Not a bit of use."

"I don't suppose they *would* be of use," said Georgina, "if it's the food, and if the poison isn't all out of your system yet."

She pinned much faith to a return to English food. As Dorrie had maintained that the German beer did not agree with Mummy, so now Mummy maintained that the German food did not agree with Dorrie. Had the time she had arranged to spend in Germany not been near its end, Georgina would have cut it short. She was not, in truth, in spite of her protestations, quite happy about Dorrie: she was not in her secret heart persuaded that Dorrie's condition was due altogether to food and to poison. She began to doubt if she had been so completely wise as she generally considered herself to be in keeping the lovers so long apart. She wondered if Dorrie were perhaps fretting a little after Len. For she was less well than throughout her healthy young life she had ever been. She seemed a little languid, and her

glands . . . Dorrie had never before suffered from swollen glands: . . .

Georgina could not make up her mind whether it came from the food and the accident or whether Len had something to do with it. It was very annoying if it was due to Len: she would much have preferred the other factors: considering that Dorrie had her mother, it was really . . . But anyhow she determined that as soon as they reached Paris, where a week was to be spent in buying some of Dorrie's trousseau, she would take Dorrie to see Dr. Béchamel. Dorrie probably required a tonic, and Dr. Béchamel would know what particular tonic she ought to have.

CHAPTER III

HAVING determined that Dorrie when in Paris should see Dr. Béchamel, Georgina became anxious to reach Paris. She found she was becoming anxious too, to be at the end of the tour: the tour, she felt, had somehow not been a success—or at least the last weeks of it. For at first Georgina had really enjoyed it, the moving about and the hotels and the sight-seeing, and Dorrie had seemed to enjoy it too, and Augustine had been cheerful and brisk. And the time at the Castle of course had been quite delightful. Georgina had been very sorry to leave the Castle; Dorrie certainly would have been sorry too had it not been for the idea of getting back to Len; as for Augustine, she had made no bones about declaring her regret.

It was Laubach which had spoilt everything—Laubach with its humiliating experiences and Georgina's

terrible headache: she could not bear to think of Laubach. It had been pleasant enough in Thüringia to be sure, and Thüringia followed upon Laubach; Dorrie had been quite merry and well during their stay on the outskirts of the forest. But somehow—whether it was that Augustine had become rather careless and tiresome—somehow everything went less smoothly than before the day or two at Laubach. And now here was Dorrie out of sorts, and fretting—Georgina felt sure she was fretting—after a young man she had known only a few months, whereas she had known her mother all her life; and here was Augustine getting more stupid and unreliable every day; and it was all very worrying.

Georgina had no patience with Augustine: she had forgiven her, but she almost regretted the forgiveness. It was not that Augustine was inattentive; she was more attentive than ever, she was lavish of attention; but, having muddled at Laubach, she seemed unable to do anything but muddle ever since. On the day when they had left Laubach, she had seemed really quite distraught, and ever since she had had periods of what Georgina, in writing to Mrs. Vearing, had described as hysteria.

The letter in which Georgina spoke of Augustine's hysteria was the letter whose contents Mrs. Vearing in high dudgeon had in part withheld from the Vicarage tea-party. But Augustine's hysteria, like the accident to Mrs. Bonham's eye, leaked out, for Mrs. Vearing, the day after the tea-party, mentioned it to Patricia Pottlebury, and Patricia mentioned it to Myra Pottlebury, and from Myra Pottlebury it wound its way in and out of Stottleham.

Stottleham was greatly interested, and it was

thought very trying for dear Mrs. Bonham to have an hysterical maid. "So awkward at hotels and railway stations," said Stottleham. But at the same time, as Mrs. Markham pointed out, if you ran the risk of taking a French maid, you must be prepared for anything. French people were so often hysterical.

"Not hysterical so much as flighty," amended Miss Ansell.

"Or immoral," put in Miss Truefitt.

Mrs. Markham said that hysterical and flighty were the same thing; and Miss Ansell said no, but that flighty and immoral were much the same thing; and Miss Truefitt maintained that all three words had a different meaning, but that French people were flighty *and* immoral. Whereupon Mrs. Markham declared that if Mrs. Bonham *had* engaged a maid who was immoral, she was quite sure she would never keep her; and this both Miss Ansell and Miss Truefitt found themselves unable to contradict.

Meanwhile Augustine, who was certainly not immoral and was not naturally flighty, and was more unhappy than hysterical, went on behaving at times as if she were distraught; and when Dorrie, finding her in tears, asked her what was the matter, she said, "I love you, Mees, and soon I leave you"; and when Georgina asked her what on earth she was crying about, she said, "It is because of Mees."

It was all very well, and Augustine could hardly be blamed for being upset at the prospect of leaving Dorrie. All the same Georgina felt that if she would only be more careful with the packing and somewhat brisker in looking after the luggage, it would be far more satisfactory.

CHAPTER IV

IN Paris Mrs. Bonham went to the Hôtel Brighton, in the Rue de Rivoli, and Dorrie was delighted with the hotel because they had rooms high up, in the front, and looked right across the Tuileries Gardens.

"I like it ever so much better than Germany, Mummy. Don't you?"

And Georgina agreed that she did, knowing, while she agreed, that Dorrie's liking was purely geographical, and that if Germany had been nearer to Len than France, Dorrie would have preferred Germany.

But Dorrie, longing to be back with Len, yet did not want to go back till she was what she called fit to be seen.

"Shall we go and see Dr. Béchamel at once?" she asked the evening of the arrival in Paris, and Georgina answered: "Certainly, darling."

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow morning. At least we must find out when he will be in. I'll 'phone, I think."

So Augustine was commissioned to telephone, since Georgina was afraid of being answered in French, and, with Georgina at her elbow, made an appointment for half-past two on the following afternoon, as the doctor would be out all morning.

Dorrie was quite excited about going to see Dr. Béchamel, and Augustine was fully as much excited as Dorrie.

"If he only makes my lip all right, I don't mind anything. I'll take the most disgusting medicine he can invent."

And Augustine replied with hysterical fervour that she hoped and she prayed that the bon Dieu and the doctor would soon make Mees as well and as beautiful as ever she had been.

Augustine, tremulous and in a mood which Georgina found extremely trying, when she and Dorrie set out for Dr. Béchamel's, was on the watch, still tremulous, when they returned.

She followed Georgina to her room.

"Madame, what he say—the doctor?"

"He—I—he said it was the kind of thing he did not understand. He—I am to take her to a specialist."

"A specialist? My God!" said Augustine.

Augustine's "mon Dieu" translated into English had always jarred upon Georgina's sense of what was reverent and befitting: at the moment it grated on her nerves.

"I do wish you would avoid your French blasphemies when you're speaking English," she said irritably. "You know how it annoys me."

But Augustine was obviously in a distraught mood and did not apologize.

"What specialist? What his name?" was all she said.

Ordinarily Georgina would have resented the question, ordinarily she would have conveyed to Augustine that she was presumptuous, and dismissed her without answering it; but then ordinarily Augustine would not have questioned, for she stood in considerable awe of Madame. And to-day Georgina, no more than Augustine, was quite herself. The idea of a specialist had alarmed her, and she did not want Dorrie to be alarmed. If only Rayke had been there! or Alicia Vearing! But there was nobody, not a soul,

to speak to. Instead of dismissing Augustine, Madame, taking her veil off before the glass, answered Augustine's question to Augustine's reflection.

"His name," said Georgina, "is Mabœuf."

Whereupon Augustine's reflection burst into tears.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Georgina, and she faced now, not the reflection, but Augustine's very self.

"I really cannot——"

"It is the nerves," said Augustine. "I dry at once the eyes"; and she did.

"You had better go," said Georgina; "you upset me. And take my coat, please; it wants brushing."

"And the hat of Madame?"

"Well, perhaps." Georgina took up a comb and began to arrange her front hair. "I suppose," she said, "he is a skin specialist."

"One would suppose so, Madame."

Augustine, no longer hysterical, departed with the coat and hat.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Georgina came out of the skin specialist's two days later, she said to Dorrie that it was all most satisfactory.

"He told *me*," said Dorrie, "that my horrid lip would soon be all right. And the glands and everything. Did he tell you the same, Mummy, when you saw him afterwards?"

"Yes, just the same."

"It is a relief. Do you know what I'd like to sing? 'Oh, let us be joyful.' Yes, I should—right out here in the street."

"I'm very glad," said Georgina, "very glad—very glad—I'm very glad."

"Why, Mummy, you're like a parrot," laughed Dorrie. "You——"

She turned as she spoke. "Why, Mummy, how funny you look! You're not—are you ill, Mummy?"

"My head," said Georgina, "is aching terribly—it makes me quite giddy."

"We'd better—you must have a cab. You should have let them call one at the doctor's."

"I'm afraid," said Georgina in the cab, "that I'm going to be as bad as I was at Laubach."

"I *am* so sorry. Poor Mummy! And just when everything seemed to be going to be lovely." In spite of her sympathy Dorrie gave a little laugh. "I shall have to take *you* to a specialist to cure you of your headaches. I hope he'll be as nice as mine."

Georgina did not answer: her eyes were closed, her brows were knit as though with pain.

"You'll have to lie down at once," said Dorrie, "as soon as ever we get back."

At the hotel Dorrie spoke to Augustine before Augustine could speak.

Poor Madame, her head was dreadfully, but dreadfully bad. Augustine must come and help to take off her things. And was the sal volatile unpacked? and where was the eau-de-Cologne?

She spoke in French. Augustine answered in English.

"And Mees? What of Mees?" she asked. She looked at Madame.

But Dorrie answered. "Oh, I? I'm all right—at least I'm soon going to be. It's Madame that matters now. Mummy, you'll go to bed at once, won't you?"

Not to bed, Georgina said, but she would go certainly and lie down. She wanted nothing—just to be left quiet. No, she did not want Augustine. She knew where the eau-de-Cologne was. And Dorrie could do nothing for her. Augustine, if Dorrie wanted to go out, could go with her. Please would they leave her quiet—not disturb her? She would ring the little hand-bell if she wanted Augustine or Dorrie. And if they were out, there was the chambermaid. But she should not want anything. She was quite sure she would soon get to sleep.

But Dorrie insisted upon going with Mummy to her room: Dorrie would not go till Mummy had taken off her dress and loosened her hair and was covered up warm and comfy on the sofa. Then, having darkened the room, Dorrie went.

When she had gone, Georgina got up from the sofa and locked the door.

CHAPTER VI

GEORGINA BONHAM, when she had locked the door, went back to the sofa. She did not lie upon it, but she sat down; having sat down, she looked at the carpet. It seemed to her that there was nothing else to do, nothing else to be done. What could she do? Except just not to let Dorrie know—at any rate not yet. But—what was it exactly that Dorrie . . . It was difficult . . . the specialist . . . These French carpets—they were quite different from English—from anything in Stottleham.

Stottleham! Georgina raised her eyes and looked round the room. Mrs. Vearing—Rayke—Mrs. Charles

Maraden—the Saunders-Parrs. . . . Were they real people? Both couldn't be real—both Stottleham and—this.

Georgina tried to think, and could not think. The numbness of shock was upon her, and presently she began to feel the cold that follows upon shock. It was warm June weather, but she shivered, and by and by the shivering of her body was recognized by her brain. She got up from the sofa and put on a warm dressing-gown and took the little brandy-flask from her dressing-case and drank some brandy.

Then she was able to think: or she thought that she was thinking. What she really did was to go, over and over again, through everything that had happened between her entrance of the specialist's house and her exit from it; and what she tried to do was to go through it exactly as it had taken place, with everything in its right order; and this was what was so difficult—to get the order right.

Things that mattered and things that did not matter, all that the specialist said and did and looked, and how and when it was she first had understood. And she could not remember just exactly when and how, which sentence had followed which, when it was that the meaning of the sentences had first come home. She could not stop trying to remember and she could not remember.

Mrs. Bonham of the Beeches had known that there were things that—well, that were not spoken of, not at least by people in any sort of a set. But these were not real things—not real to Mrs. Bonham. They were sort of in the world, but not in any world that mattered. And nice people didn't think about them; the nicer you were, the less did you ever dream of

thinking about them. They were things that had to do with dreadful people, things that were walled off from religious, respectable people, things that never could come within miles of the people who knew and were known by Mrs. Bonham.

And now they had come.

There was an illness—Mrs. Bonham had known that—an illness that had something to do with an Act of Parliament. Mrs. Vearing, one day—in the dusk, when it was nearly dark—had somehow arrived at mention of the Act (and had apologized for the arrival), and had said that Adam had said that Dr. Rayke had said that it ought to be repealed; or that it ought not to have been repealed; Mrs. Vearing was not sure which. But it didn't matter; it was no concern of Mrs. Vearing's or Mrs. Bonham's; it had to do with something which could not affect anybody in any set in Stottleham.

And now Dorrie . . .

It was not surprising that Mrs. Bonham could not think. Suddenly into the bliss of ignorance, knowledge had come like a knife: the mere knowledge, the mere cutting was a shock, apart from the depth of the wound, apart from what was wounded.

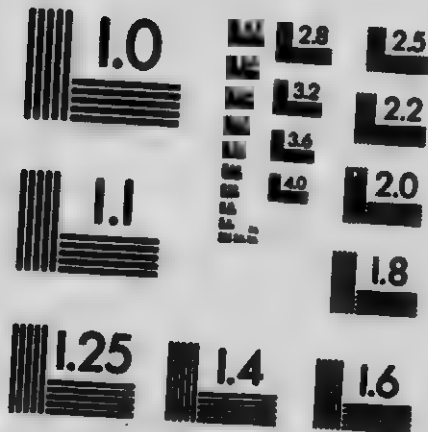
Sitting on the sofa, Mrs. Bonham was conscious of the cutting, but not conscious yet of the extent or full nature of the wound. The cutting was uppermost in her consciousness, partly because it was so recent and the shock of it still held her, and partly because she dared not think of all that by the cutting had been sundered.

Of Dorrie she dared not think. She would be cured of course. The specialist had spoken of treatment . . . and back in England Rayke . . . he would know,



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advise . . . but . . . Never could the horror of it, the disgrace . . . Dorrie! Mrs. Bonham's daughter—guarded, brought up, looked after, as in all Stottleham no one's daughter had been cared for, protected, watched.

How? As the shock a little bit wore off, that was the insistent question. How? Instead of the interview at the specialist's, the question possessed her. How? Back and back she went, through all the travels, and forward again, and once more back. He had said, the specialist, that it was possible in all sorts of ordinary ways and places—hotels—waiting-rooms . . . But surely . . . Of the hundreds and thousands that travelled, Dorrie . . . Some special place, some special way, surely . . .

She sat there on the sofa, too wretched to be restless, and, as a little the shock died down, anguish arose: the blind anguish of an unimaginative being plunged into experience. It surpassed any suffering she could have believed possible: nothing could exceed it.

CHAPTER VII

YET it was exceeded, and by means of Augustine.

That evening, when Dorrie was safely in bed, Augustine came to brush Madame's hair. Ostensibly that was her reason for coming, but Madame did not want her hair brushed, nor did Augustine want to brush it. There was something Augustine wanted to ask Madame: there was something too that Madame wanted to ask Augustine. Madame remembered what she wanted to ask only when Augustine came in: Augustine had been remembering all the afternoon.

For weeks Augustine had been on tenterhooks. Madame, more than a month ago, had adjudicated to her the position of a criminal: she had accepted the position and had then by Madame been forgiven. But fate, as well as Madame, fate, after befooling her, had also placed her in the position of a criminal, and all these weeks Augustine had not known what fate was going to do; whether, having snared her, fate would tighten the snare, or whether she would be granted a reprieve.

Augustine stood before Madame: what Augustine wanted to know was all that was known to Madame: what Madame wanted to know was how much Augustine knew. And neither could obtain the information wanted without a risk of giving herself away.

Georgina was the more unhappy and Augustine was the more afraid. It was Georgina who began.

"Did you know, when I spoke to you of Dr. Mabœuf, what kind of a specialist he was?"

"Yes, Madame."

"What illness—disease——?"

"Yes, Madame."

"How did you know?"

"I was maid here in Paris, in a family where he came."

"And you knew—then?"

"In families, Madame, the servants know always all."

Georgina waited; Augustine waited too.

"Then," Georgina said, "when I said it was to Dr. Mabœuf I was to take—we were to go . . .?"

"Madame, I was broken with fear."

Georgina looked at Augustine and then she looked at the floor.

"But he is—he might be a specialist for—other things. Why should you think . . . ?"

Georgina by her questions had largely given herself away. Augustine took no notice of her poor attempt to find covert.

"Oh, Madame," she said, "what did he say of Mees ?"

Georgina raised her eyes and looked at Augustine and looked away again. She was trying to think of something to say that would put Augustine off, but she could not think of anything, she could not think properly at all ; and even if she had thought of something quite clever and said it, it would not have put Augustine off—with Madame's face before her.

Augustine knew what she had wanted to know, and without having given herself away ; but now, suddenly and completely, without being obliged to do it, she gave, threw herself away. But Augustine had never had discretion.

She wrung her hands.

"It is what I fear all the time, always. I watch, I fear, I hope. My God ! my God !" said Augustine.

"You feared ? You ? All the time ? What do you mean ?"

The lethargy in Georgina's brain, the numbness of the shock, was suddenly gone. Mrs. Bonham of the Beeches leapt forth to life again.

Too late Augustine saw what she had done, and recognized at once that it was too late : with Mrs. Bonham she knew she had no chance. Sobbing, terrified, wretched, Augustine fell upon her knees.

And then it all came out : the reason why Augustine had been distraught, and why she had been careless, and why, so often, she had verged upon hysterics.

Augustine, at the hotel at Laubach, had, it appeared, betrayed what Madame had charged her most rigorously to conceal. Not on the first evening, not on the evening when Mees was kept at the clinic, but on the evening following upon Mees's return. Then, overcome by misery—for Madame had not yet forgiven her—by misery and indiscretion, she had spoken to the servants of the hotel of Madame's anger and its cause. And the servants had told her . . .

Here Augustine broke off and blamed herself, not in that she had been indiscreet, but in that she had been indiscreet too late. Had she known, only known, on the evening before, nothing—in all the world nothing—would have prevented her from at once bringing back Mees.

Augustine wrung her hands and wept anew. Madame needed all the force of Mrs. Bonham to drive her on.

The doctor Reisen, Augustine went on at last, knew much of—what the doctor Mabœuf knew much of. But the doctor Reisen had made experiments—very many. It was to find out. On animals first of all; and then, because from the animals the results were not sure enough—then in his clinic upon . . .

"Not—oh, not . . . ?" said Georgina.

"But yes," said Augustine.

There had been a—Augustine did not know the word—a process, she called it.

"A trial!"

Perhaps. . . . It was some years before, and it was because of girls—young girls—eight; the servants had said eight. He had told it in the papers. He was proud, because of his discoveries, and he had told it, and there had been a process.

"But——" Georgina interrupted Augustine—"but he is still there—free!"

Yes, he was still there. In Germany, Augustine said, things were very strange. He told nothing now—not in papers: but there was talk—stories, that still . . . And the servants had said: "You never know."

And this it was that had haunted Augustine. You never knew. This it was which had caused her to be distraught and almost impossible. She had watched and feared and hoped and prayed. My God, how she had prayed! And then—and then . . . the illness of Mees . . . and at the last the doctor Mabœuf and the face of Madame. "Oh, my God!" said Augustine.

CHAPTER VIII

GEORGINA, when Augustine had left her, undressed and got into bed. She undressed because it was bedtime and she was accustomed at bedtime to undress, and, having put on her nightgown, it would have seemed to her almost indecent not to get into bed.

She got into bed and lay down; but here the bonds and bandages of custom broke; she could not keep on lying down. She sat up in bed and looked into the darkness, and she remembered all sorts of things.

First of all she remembered her visit to Herr Reisen at his flat, his restless striding to and fro, his astounded comprehension, his angry distress, his suggestion that Dorrie should stay on at Laubach to be "treated." "For what?" Mrs. Bonham had asked. She knew now; she understood. The figure of Herr Reisen, radiating dismay, seemed to pass somehow through and behind all the other things she remembered.

Amongst these other things she remembered first a speech of the Gräfin's. The Gräfin had made it while she was writing her letter to Herr Reisen; she had turned round from her writing-table and made it. "He is a very clever man," the Gräfin had said, "and to me most charming and most kind—though he is one of those Jews. But he has enemies, he has been attacked. There was an action—I do not know if that is the right word—to do with the law—it was while we were in France. I do not know what it was about, and Fritz (Fritz was the Graf) told me I had better not go into it, but it was something to do with his scientific work." Then the Gräfin had turned back again and gone on with the letter, and Georgina remembered what she had replied to the Gräfin. "He looks clever," she had said.

Then, after the Gräfin, she remembered things ever so far back at the very beginning of Dorrie's life. People, when death comes near, are said to see the whole of their past lives suddenly, in a flash, and it was something in that way that Georgina's memory, flung back, showed her event after event: only it was not her own life that passed before her, but Dorrie's, and it passed, though with swiftness, not in a flash.

She saw Dorrie as a baby, and Hannah applying for the situation as nurse, and Hannah arriving and established as Nurse. She saw Dorrie changing from baby to child and outgrowing Nurse, and she remembered everything that occurred when Nurse had been transformed into Hannah; the conversations with Rayke and Mrs. Vearing, and that Mrs. Vearing had wanted to sit in the arbour and that the arbour had seemed to Georgina damp. She remembered the dinner before Nurse had been summoned, the cutlet

and the extra half-glass of claret, and everything that Nurse had said and that she had said to Nurse. Then came the first night that Dorrie had slept in the dressing-room and all that Dorrie had asked for and wanted. And after that came the nursery governesses.

Georgina remembered them all, every one of them ; not all the names, but many of the names, and all the faces. They passed in procession before her as she sat up in bed : Miss Snell who smoked cigarettes, Miss Parkins who bit her nails, Miss—she could not remember the name of the governess who ate peppermints, but she remembered her face. Then there was Mrs. Flores who was cruel, and Miss Bell the suffragette, and—again the name was not there—the teetotaller, and Miss Bootham, the anti- . . .

Georgina's pulses, which were beating quickly, beat suddenly in a succession of leaps. Miss Bootham—she did not see Miss Bootham's face so clearly as some of the other faces, but clearly she remembered what she had said. Her statements had outraged Georgina at the time because they were so outrageous ; she remembered how outraged she had felt ; and at the Guild meeting they had all been outraged. And Georgina had enquired into the statements, and especially the one about experiments . . . the animals and the human beings ; and the Vicar and Rayke had said that it was false. That was because they did not know, because they were ignorant of Germans and of what was done in Germany. It was only England they knew ; and perhaps France ; or perhaps not only France ; they might have known all the other countries in the world except Germany and yet not have known that Miss Bootham spoke the truth. To know that Miss Bootham spoke truth, you had to know Germany.

At the thought of Germany, the pictures of Dorrie's past went right away, and the sort of burning feeling that had been behind them flared up and filled Georgina and the room and the darkness. She knew it for anger, she knew now how bitterly angry she was; it was more than anger. And in it was the determination to bring the professor to justice. It should be done. She would make it known, the infamy of him; it should be known everywhere, all over the world, in France, America . . . of course in England. She would expose him and bring him to justice. It would not be difficult, once she was back in England. There were ambassadors, consuls—— And then there was the "Times."

Suddenly she saw a past copy of the "Times," and a special sheet and a special column and a special announcement: "A marriage has been arranged between Leonard Reginald, only son of the late Reginald Fortescue and Lady Clementina Fortescue, and grandson of . . ."

A blackness of fear and pain fell upon Georgina. Would it ever be? Len . . . Lady Clementina . . . All her hopes and pride, all that had made the splendour of Mrs. Bonham was torn in a travail of humiliation. And worse than the humiliation, worse than anything that could happen to herself or her hopes, was the thought—but she dared not think it, the thought of what would happen to Dorrie if . . . She dared not follow the thought.

CHAPTER IX

GEORGINA had remembered with extraordinary clearness the childhood of Dorrie, and all her life she remembered it. But she never afterwards could recall with any clearness what took place between her first visit to Dr. Mabœuf and her arrival in England. She had a heavy sense of what she had felt, but only a blurred recollection of what she had done.

She remembered that she had gone a second time to see Dr. Mabœuf; she remembered asking him how long it would take for the evil to show itself; and she remembered, when he answered her, telling him of what she felt to be the truth. She had told him with no doubt in her mind of his sympathy, his indignation, his eagerness to expose Herr Reisen; he would scout and condemn him as surely, as bitterly, as Georgina herself.

And instead of scouting Herr Reisen, Dr. Mabœuf had scouted Georgina.

There was no proof, he said, of Mrs. Bonham's accusation. He would not even listen to Mrs. Bonham. The treatment Monsieur the Professor had given could have no connection with the indisposition of Mademoiselle. As for the dates—the time—Mademoiselle had been at other places in Laubach besides the clinic of Monsieur le Docteur Reisen; and just before and just after Laubach . . . "Oh, non, Madame."

Yet, by his face, Georgina, always shrewd and now with a shrewdness doubled and trebled by the desire to find out, to understand, by his face Georgina had realized that he had known the meaning of Dorrie's

arm and lip; and realizing, she had remembered question she had put to Dorrie, questions that had no meaning for her at the time.

Had Dorrie touched her arm just after Herr Reisen had treated it, Dr. Mabœuf had asked, and then touched her lip? "Oh no," Dorrie had said; but he had continued to question her till she had told him that she had bent her face to her arm to see if the injection had any smell.

Mrs. Bonham, remembering, had recalled these questions to Dr. Mabœuf. Why had he asked them, if between lip and arm there was no connection?

She could see always, as she went over and over again through the interview, the shrug of Dr. Mabœuf's shoulders.

"Once there is an opening in the skin, who can tell what may enter?" he had said. "It is the duty of a doctor to enquire in every direction." She could not remember what reply she had made or if she had replied at all, but only the bitterness of her emotion.

And she remembered that the specialist had shrugged his shoulders again when she had spoken of the others—the eight. He had said nothing; he had just shrugged his shoulders and spread out the palms of his hands. And again she could not properly recall what she had said or done, but only what she had felt. She did not remember taking leave of the French doctor, or whether she took leave at all, nor did she remember going out of his house. She only remembered being in the street, and then at the hotel.

And after that second visit to the doctor she remembered buying things. She had to buy things because of Dorrie; part of Dorrie's trousseau was to

be bought in Paris, and Georgina did not know what to say; she had not yet made up her mind what she was going to say to Dorrie. She must wait, till she got back to England,—and to Rayke. And in the meantime, not knowing what to say, she had to go on buying things.

In the bewilderment, the sense of darkness, of upheaval, of disintegration, it was to Rayke that her thoughts turned most for help, for hope, almost for salvation. He had been so wise always, so kind, and so dependable. She thought of their talks, their consultations, and it was such a relief to think of them instead of the other things; how carefully he had listened, how cleverly he had counselled. At the time when Hannah had become Hannah; and again in the testing of Miss Kimmidge; and times upon times—countless times.

Georgina half wondered whether at that time when he and she had so nearly joined forces, she had been wise to put him off. If he had been her husband, with his man's knowledge, his understanding of what women—of what Georgina had not known, perhaps this—all that was happening might not have happened. She did not know, and it was too late now. But still, even as things were, she could turn to him; for knowledge and skill and sympathy and cleverness; as counsellor, as her very dear, trusted friend. She seemed to see herself talking to him, telling him, pouring it all out. And oh the relief of it!

Only a week ago, it would have seemed to Georgina that to hint even at such things as she now imagined herself pouring out to him, would have been a sheer impossibility because it would have seemed a sheer impropriety. But now! The world was in ruins

now, and when the world is in ruins, it does not matter half so much what you do or say.

In ruins her world was—but for Rayke. He stood up out of the ruins straight and strong. Georgina, spent with anxiety and bewilderment, felt a measure almost of hope, almost of cheerfulness, on the morning when she and Dorrie left Paris for England.

BOOK VIII

HANNAH

CHAPTER I

It was with a sense of relief and satisfaction that Mrs. Bonham set foot on English soil. She had always believed that English people, English customs, English ideas, English speech, English everything, were superior to anything belonging to any other nation, but never had English superiority seemed so superior or so consoling as when Georgina, with Dorrie, landed at Dover. The porters who spoke and looked English, the Custom House officials, the familiar-looking English train, even the half-cold tea at the station, all were consoling and also fortifying to Mrs. Bonham.

Dorrie would not have any tea. She had begun to have a cold the day before, and she had been seasick during the crossing, and did not want anything to eat or drink. But Georgina drank a cup of tea and ate a bun, and, almost without knowing it, enjoyed both. It was the first time she had come anywhere near enjoying food or drink since the visit to Dr. Mabœuf, and the enjoyment was due to the relief of getting back to England.

All the way in the train she told herself what a relief it was ; she hugged the relief and the comfort of it. To be in England, the land of justice, of freedom, of religion, where doings like Dr. Reisen's would not be tolerated, where Dr. Reisen himself would be

scorned and abhorred. That horrible Dr. Mabœuf—to Georgina he seemed horrible—had refused to condemn, had indeed tried to shield him. It showed what he was, what the French were. But in England! In England the whole medical profession would unite in condemnation.

She looked at Dorrie sitting opposite to her, with closed eyes, with the pink of her cheeks wiped out, and the sweet, blemished mouth; and every ounce of tenderness that was in Georgina's soul went out to Dorrie, and all the indignation of which she was capable rose up and burned about her thought of Herr Dr. Reisen. Then, through the window, she saw the Kentish hops and the serene Kentish landscape, and she remembered that she was in England and took comfort.

For once in England, with doctors she could trust, there was hope. That horrible man—whom she had not thought horrible at all at the first visit, but charming and kind—even *he* had said that with time and treatment . . . And besides it was impossible—back in England Mrs. Bonham felt it to be impossible—that anything so unspeakable could endure. In Stottleham. . . oh no; when she thought of Stottleham, she knew it could not endure. She would take Dorrie to some nice clever man, an *English* specialist; and she and Dorrie would stay in London for a time till . . . Dorrie should not return to Stottleham till she was quite, quite well. And never in Stottleham should it be known that . . . except to Rayke. Rayke's advice and co-operation were essential; and also his sympathy and his strength. Mrs. Bonham had never wanted to lean—or not to lean much—on anybody: Dorrie's mother felt that she wanted to lean on Rayke

just now a good deal. Rayke—Stottleham—England.
—What a comfort it was to be back !

CHAPTER II

GEORGINA had telegraphed to Hannah to meet them at Charing Cross.

Augustine had been left in Paris. Georgina felt that it was impossible to bear any longer the presence of Augustine. Augustine had wept and declared it was not her fault, that she was desolate, that she would have given her life, and God knew it, sooner than that harm should have come to Mees. But Georgina could not put up even with the sight of Augustine. It might not have been her fault. And yet it was. But for her stupidity, her pretending to know German—— In spite of her tears and protestations, and in spite of Dorrie's intercessions, for Dorrie was sorry for Augustine, Augustine was left in Paris.

"Mummy, I think you're rather hard on poor Augustine," Dorrie had said. "She can't *help* losing her head over the packing sometimes ; and she's very obliging."

"I know what I am doing," Georgina had replied ; and Dorrie knew from Mummy's face and voice that Augustine had no chance.

And once Augustine had been said good-bye to, Dorrie could not help feeling rather glad, since saying good-bye to Augustine meant saying how do you do to Hannah. And Hannah, though outside she was housemaid, had never stopped—in her own inside and in Dorrie's—being Nurse.

Georgina had telegraphed to Hannah to meet them, and there, on the platform, was Hannah, with her

face what Dorrie called bunched up ; it was a peculiarity of Hannah's face when she was moved ; moved to joy that is to say, for sorrow made her impassive.

Hannah, with a bunched-up face and hungry eyes, was searching the length of the train ; but not for long ; she saw Dorrie the very instant she got out.

" Oh, Hannah," said Dorrie, as soon as she had finished saying how do you do, " don't I look horrid ? "

" You seem to have a cold, Miss Dorrie."

" Yes, I've got a cold, and I've been seasick, and . . . "

" Come along, Dorrie ! " said Georgina. " There's the luggage to look after "

Hannah was certainly better at getting the luggage than Augustine had been, at least than Augustine had been since leaving Laubach ; and soon Georgina and Dorrie and Hannah were on their way to the Malden Hotel. Georgina, before telegraphing for Hannah, had engaged rooms, and the rooms were all ready, and Georgina felt them to be very English and satisfactory.

She was thankful, apart from the satisfactoriness of the rooms and the relief of being in London, to have the journey over. She had begun, before leaving Paris, to feel physically the strain of the Paris week, and now she was very tired, and was thankful to think there was no more travelling ; she did not count the going down to Stottleham to see Rayke as travelling.

Georgina was very tired, but not so tired as Dorrie. Dorrie was dreadfully tired and said she would like to go to bed at once. So to bed she went, tended by Hannah ; and when she was in bed Hannah brought her tea and toast, which was all she would consent to have ; she drank every drop of tea, but did not eat much of the toast.

Hannah was distressed, but Hannah could not remonstrate much, because Dorrie said : " Now, Nurse darling, don't bother me ! I want to go to sleep."

So Hannah could not bother her ; she could only take away the tray and hover about till Dorrie was asleep. And when Dorrie was asleep, she went to Mrs. Bonham, for Mrs. Bonham had said that when Hannah was done with Miss Dorrie, she wanted to speak to her.

CHAPTER III

HANNAH went to Mrs. Bonham and Mrs. Bonham told her what she considered Hannah would have to know. She did not tell her of Herr Reisen and of the clinic ; she could not find the words or the courage to tell her ; she only told Hannah what Hannah had to know. She had to know ; it would have been impossible to keep it from her ; and impolitic too, for Hannah's help was needed. As for her discretion, there could be no discretion greater than Hannah's.

Hannah listened with a face as impassive as her face had been on the evening when Georgina had broken to her that Dorrie had outgrown her ; and, as on that evening, there came a point when Georgina said to her that she had better sit down.

When Hannah had sat down, Georgina said :

" Did you know—of such things ? "

Hannah answered : " Yes, ma'am."

They sat in silence ; till Georgina said :

" I never knew."

" You was brought up different from me," said Hannah.

Again there was silence, and then Georgina said: "I suppose so."

"I was brought up," said Hannah, "so as I had to know."

"Do you know—much?"

Hannah stood up.

"Oh, ma'am, I know what it all means."

"Don't!" said Georgina: she spoke to something in Hannah's face and voice.

"Sit down again!"

Hannah obeyed.

"Then you know that there's a—that it can be cured."

"Ye-es. Only you never know."

"What do you mean by that?" Georgina's voice was sharp. "What do you mean?"

"I've seen cures; and the children had it."

Georgina looked at Hannah and Hannah looked at Georgina. There was terror in Georgina's eyes. There was something in the eyes of Hannah that held Georgina as steel holds a magnet.

Presently Georgina said: "But it can, it can—completely."

Hannah answered: "I'd sooner see her in her coffin than cast off."

"Cast off? What in the world . . . please think of what you're saying."

"I'm thinking," said Hannah, "of Mr. Fortescue."

"But," said Georgina, "when she's cured . . ."

"Women marries men—cured and sometimes not, but men don't marry women."

"But Mr. Fortescue—he—just worships her."

"It's because men know, and women doesn't," said Hannah.

"But he—Len—Hannah, you know as well as I do that he worships her."

"If *I* was him," said Hannah, "d'you think I wouldn't have her? D'you think I'd think of myself, or the children—if I couldn't stop 'er having any—? D'you think I'd think of *anything* except not breaking her 'eart?"

"Well, you don't suppose you care more than he does? The idea!" said Georgina.

Hannah said nothing.

"Do you think," Georgina said after a while, "I shall have to tell him?—now I mean, before she's . . . at once?"

"Yes," Hannah answered, "because he'd find it out and that 'ud be worse."

After another little while Georgina said: "I think—you'd better go now, Hannah."

Hannah got up and went away.

She went up to the unfamiliar room whither she had brought certain familiar things; her Bible, Dorrie's photograph, a green silk pincushion, a blue glass bottle, three parts full of the aconite and iodine mixture to which, rather than to the dentist's skill, Hannah pinned her faith. The bottle was on the mantelpiece, and Hannah, pausing as it caught her eye, stood and looked at it.

Years ago Mrs. Bonham had reproached her for leaving just such a bottle in a cupboard that was unlocked, a cupboard from which Dorrie, reaching up from a chair, had extracted it and spilt the contents on the floor. "It might have been the child's death," Mrs. Bonham had said. "Dr. Rayke said it would have stopped her heart beating." Hannah remembered the look on Mrs. Bonham's face, the sound in

her voice and the misery in her own heart at the picture of what might have been—a misery far deeper in reproach than the words of Mrs. Bonham. Now, standing looking at the bottle, the thought came: Supposing that what might have been, had been, would it perhaps, after all . . . She could not carry the thought to its end, not definitely, not in words.

CHAPTER IV

THE next morning Georgina told Len.

Len came bursting in before Georgina had finished her breakfast. He was full of delighted expectation; and where was Dorrie? It seemed as if he had half expected her to be waiting for him on the steps of the hotel.

He had arrived last night late. When he knew Dorrie was to be in London, of course he had to be in London too; but her letter telling him that they were to arrive a day earlier than he had expected, had only come by the evening post, too late for him to catch any but the latest train. And he had meant to meet them at the station! Wasn't it disappointing?

Mrs. Bonham said yes, because it seemed the only thing to say; she could not say that she had made her plans with a view to prevent Len being able to meet them at the station.

But Dorrie—now that he was here. What a bore that she was having her breakfast in bed! Of course if she was tired——

"Very tired," said Georgina.

"And had a cold——"

"A bad cold," said Georgina.

Well, then, of course—but it was beastly rough luck. And how long—when would she be down?

Perhaps not all day, Georgina told him.

"Oh, I say!"

Suddenly Len's face changed. "I say, she isn't really ill, is she?"

"Yes, she's—she's rather ill."

"What is it? How long——? Why didn't you send—wire? What is it?"

Georgina was trembling.

"I don't know—Len, oh, Len, I don't know how to tell you."

Len's face was white, his eyes were dim with fear.

"You've got to tell me."

Georgina told him. It took some time to make him understand.

When he had understood and had gone away, Georgina went into her bedroom; it was nearly time to get ready to go to Stottleham. In her bedroom Hannah was waiting.

"Did you tell him?" Hannah asked.

"Yes, I told him."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything. He sat with his face in his hands."

"What did he think?"

"I don't know."

"Couldn't you tell by his face?"

"When he took his hands from his face, he got up and went away."

"He didn't say nothing?"

"He didn't even say good-bye."

"I was watching," said Hannah, "and I see him go down, but I couldn't get a sight of his face." She

turned away. "If I'd have seen him," she said to herself, "I'd have known."

CHAPTER V

ALL the way from Paris Georgina had comforted herself with the thought of seeing Rayke, and now very soon she would see him. She was in the train, on her way to Stottleham, really on the way: in a little more than two hours she would see him.

She needed more than ever to see him. She was shaken, unnerved, near to breaking-point: there was not a soul in Stottleham who could have conceived the possibility of dear Mrs. Bonham craving for support, for guidance, as Mrs. Bonham craved to-day. She had been always sure of herself and Stottleham had admired her self-security; it seemed to add a certain security to Stottleham. But now she was not sure of anything, not even of herself: there was nothing she could be sure of, save only the wisdom and the sympathy of Rayke.

And Rayke—what would he say? She could imagine his horror and his anger, but she could not imagine his advice. But the advice would be there, and it would ease the terrible pain of anxiety that was pressing upon her. She did not know, had not since the beginning of the terror known, what to do. Rayke would know. He would tell her exactly what to do, which way to take, and she felt that the way he would indicate to her would be a way that would lead her out of her trouble. For he always found solutions. There was rest in the very recollection of his past wisdom, peace in the fact that she would see him soon. His mere understanding would be balm,

and she was assured of the fulness of it, and the kind look in his eyes . . . and the soothing voice. . . . She almost seemed to hear it now, through the rumble of the train: "Dear friend, don't worry; I will tell you what to do."

Where were they now? Ah, just past Mugford. Every mile of the line was familiar to Georgina, and each landmark assured her that she was nearer and nearer to the relief she craved for.

She had bought several papers at the station; she took them up, opened them and glanced through them one after the other: she did not want to remember any more, nor did she want to look forward. The thought of the meeting with Rayke was making her tremulous, and she did not want to be tremulous; she must be collected, calm, able to tell him everything with the lucidity he admired. So she looked at the papers: it was something to do and it gave her mind a little rest from rushing on and backwards.

Some of the papers were illustrated; she opened the illustrated ones first and looked at the pictures; and when she had looked at them all, she found her thoughts leaping back again—to Paris, to Laubach, or forward to the meeting that was so near. She took up the other papers, the papers that had no pictures, and scanned the pages carelessly. She could not read them; there was nothing in them that could interest her; papers were concerned with the outside world, and in all the world outside her trouble there was nothing that seemed to matter.

She glanced at the headings; they occupied her eyes and helped to keep her mind steady. She went on from one to the other—slowly, so that they should not too soon be done, for when they were done her

mind would be again defenceless. Then, in her languid perfunctory following of the lines, her eye caught a name, and immediately the languor was gone and in its place burned interest intense and keen.

Georgina read, and then she dropped the paper. She picked it up and looked at it again to see what it was that had seemed to her for the moment real, to be actually written there: for—so she told herself—her brain had tricked her; what she had imagined could not be real.

But it was real; or else she was mad.

She leaned forward and said to a lady on the opposite seat:

"Excuse me! would you mind telling me what that name is? My sight is a little uncertain."

"With pleasure. It's Reisen, Dr. Reisen."

"I—I thought it looked like that."

"He seems to be well known," the lady said. "A German, I believe, who has done wonders for medical science."

"Yes," said Georgina. "Thank you."

She took up the paper again and read once more the announcement of the lecture that was to be given by Professor Reisen; read that he was to give the lecture to an English medical society, and read what the subject of the lecture was to be. Ten days ago she would not have understood what the subject was, but she understood now.

It was in her mind to say to the lady opposite: "Do you know who he is? what he has done?" It was in her mind to tell her all his infamy; but it was not clearly there because her mind was dazed; she was too dazed to be able to speak. She said nothing.

The thing she had read was beating into her. He

had left Germany and come to England . . . he was here in England, in London . . . he was welcomed, he . . .

She sat with the paper on her knee, dazed, till the train reached Stottleham.

CHAPTER VI

THE getting to Stottleham brought Georgina to herself; it seemed to her that it brought her also to salvation. She felt as the train stopped and she got out on to the platform that for her, then, in the chaos that had come to her, Rayke and salvation were one. And now he was very near. To reach him her strength would endure; afterwards—well, afterwards she would have his strength to cling to, to lean upon, his wisdom to point out her path; and always his sympathy.

The station-master was wreathed in smiles on the platform, and all the porters were touching their caps. They were greeting Mrs. Bonham after her sojourn on the Continent, and Mrs. Bonham would have enjoyed what she would have accepted as Mrs. Bonham's due. Mrs. Bonham would have responded with smiles, with appropriate enquiries addressed to the station-master, with appropriate tips bestowed upon the porters. Mrs. Bonham had pictured just such an arrival as this, only with Dorrie and Augustine and many boxes and the greater part of Dorrie's trousseau. The dazed, harried soul in Mrs. Bonham's body knew only one desire, and that was to reach Rayke.

No, she had no luggage . . . just for the day. It was a beautiful day, yes, and she was quite well, and she hoped the station-master's wife was quite well. She gave a porter sixpence and got into a cab.

"No, not the Beeches. To Dr. Rayke's."

In the cab Georgina breathed with relief: there was nothing more to do now, to think about, till she saw Rayke. She felt, as she drove down the High Street, as if during the last eight or nine days she had been holding something in herself together, as if she could not hold it much longer, as if, did she not have some help in the holding, the something would break.

She had chosen a closed cab and she sat far back in it. She did not want Stottleham to see her. Once seen, Stottleham would flock around her. Mrs. Bonham, the dear Mrs. Bonham who had gone abroad, would have rejoiced in the flocking: the dazed Mrs. Bonham who returned shrank from the thought of it.

Ah, there went Miss Pottlebury, and behind her, a few paces behind, was Mrs. Charles Marsden, and on the other side of the road was Miss Truefitt. Georgina shrank back in the cab.

Now the cab turned out of the High Street. There was the church—and the Vicarage. And now, here was Rayke's house.

"Shall I wait, ma'am?" asked the cabman.

"No, don't wait."

Georgina's hand trembled as she paid him; she trembled slightly all over as she waited at the door. Such a long way, such a long time, but she was here at last! Oh, the comfort of it!

The parlour-maid opened the door, and started with surprise, and smiled with welcome.

"You, ma'am! Who'd have thought . . .? I'm sure I'm glad to see you back."

"Dr. Rayke—is he in?"

"I'm sorry, ma'am . . ."

"I want particularly to see him, I *must* see him. I'll come in—will he be long?—I'll come in and wait."

"He's away, ma'am."

"Away?" Georgina's voice faltered.

"In London, ma'am. There's some great doctor come from abroad—Germany I think—and the master's gone up to bid him welcome."

CHAPTER VII

"No," said Georgina, "no, thank you, I won't come in. And there's no message, no. No, thank you."

"I'm very sorry, ma'am. And the master . . ."

"It doesn't matter at all," said Georgina, "not in the least."

Did it? Georgina turned and went along the street, back along the way she had come. Did it matter? She thought not. There wasn't anything really that mattered—not very much. The thing inside that she had been holding together, *that* mattered; it mattered that she should hold it still. There was not anything else.

"Mrs. Bonham! You? Back? Of course I knew you were to arrive in London, but— How *nice* to see you back!"

It was Patricia Pottlebury who blocked Mrs. Bonham's way with a beaming face. She still wore her hat on one side, and it was very much on one side now.

"I'm not—it's just for the day. We shall be in London for a long time. How are the children?"

"Oh, ever so well. Baby's just got his third tooth, and Dorothy . . . But I want to hear about *you*. How

are you? You don't look—are you quite well, Mrs. Bonham?" Patricia's eyes were puzzled.

"Exceedingly well, thank you. How's Mr. Pottlebury?"

"A touch of rheumatism, but except for that . . . And Dorrie?"

"She's quite . . . She's not very well."

"I *am* sorry. What is it?"

"It's—it's influenza. How is Miss Pottlebury?"

"Thank you so much. Myra's much as usual. I hope it isn't a *bad* attack. And just now—when she'll be wanting to get her trousseau. You're staying in London for that, of course."

"Of course," said Mrs. Bonham. "I'm going," she added, "to the Vicarage."

"Might I just walk with you—as far as that?" Patricia turned as she spoke and walked along by the side of Mrs. Bonham. "Dr. Rayke's in London," she went on, "to meet this German doctor they think so much of. But of course you know."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bonham.

"He's been looking forward to it. He told Ludovic . . . But about Dorrie. It's not a *bad* attack?"

"Not at—yes, it's rather bad."

"I *am* sorry. But not—you're not *anxious* about her, Mrs. Bonham?"

"Oh no, I'm not anxious, I'm not the least anxious."

"I'm so glad; I was half afraid . . . Here we are! Thank you so much for letting me walk with you. Please give my love to Dorrie."

"And mine to Ludovic," said Mrs. Bonham. She was not thinking of what she was saying; never before had she sent any message of greeting to Ludovic

Pottlebury. What she was thinking was that Alicia Vearing had been always kind.

She had said she was going to the Vicarage partly to get rid of Patricia Pottlebury, partly because she had to go somewhere, and the Beeches was still shut up, partly because of the sense of Alicia's kindness. She could not stay in the street till the train went; she had the feeling that if she stayed in the street the thing inside her would break loose; Alicia and her kindness might help her to hold it together.

CHAPTER VIII

ALICIA had been always kind, and to-day she was very, very kind. It was too delightful to see dearest Georgina, and too sweet of dearest Georgina to have come down. But how tired dearest Georgina looked! and Mrs. Vearing was sure she had had no lunch. The Vicarage lunch was over, but there was plenty—Cook, in a moment . . .

No, said Georgina, she had a headache, she couldn't really . . .

"Then a cup of coffee, just a cup—and perhaps a biscuit. It will pick you up."

Georgina agreed to the coffee; it was the line of least resistance; and it did pick her up. It picked her up wonderfully, perhaps because Alicia had it made extra strong: it took away the dull heavy feeling that had been pressing upon her all the time she had talked and listened to Patricia Pottlebury, and made her feel intensely keen in mind and in memory: it made her feel that she wanted to talk and tell things.

After the coffee, the Vicar came in, and Adam as

well as Alicia was so sorry to hear that Dorrie had influenza, and Adam as well as Alicia was so sorry that Rayke was away. Adam supposed, as Alicia had supposed, that Mrs. Bonham wished to consult him about Dorrie's influenza.

Georgina said yes, she had thought—if he had been at home . . .

What a pity she hadn't known, Alicia said. Rayke being in London, it would have been so easy to see him there; and he could have seen Dorrie.

Adam said he could give her Rayke's address; he didn't know when Rayke was coming home, but he could give Mrs. Bonham his address; he supposed from what Rayke had said, that he would stay on in London as long as Professor Reisen did.

And then they both began to talk about Professor Reisen.

He must be so clever, Alicia said, from what Dr. Rayke had told them, but apparently not fully appreciated in Germany. "So extraordinary, for I always understood that German doctors. . . . But a prophet in his own country, you know."

When Alicia stopped, Adam went on. "Yes, very extraordinary; but so Dr. Rayke said, in his own country his work had not been properly recognized. But here—after the lecture, I understand, he is to be given the Society's gold medal."

"Gold medal," repeated Mrs. Bonham.

"Yes, on account, I believe, of some very remarkable discoveries he has made—through experiments." Adam, saying this, looked extraordinarily important.

"I didn't hear about the experiments," said Mrs. Vearing. "I don't think Dr. Rayke . . . What were they about, Adam?"

"I couldn't—it's a subject—I couldn't . . ." murmured Adam.

But Georgina could: Georgina could and did. She burst into speech: she found herself telling Alicia what Augustine had told her; telling Alicia, and also Adam. A year ago—a month ago—she would have died sooner than have referred remotely to the subject of Herr Reisen's experiments within earshot of Adam. But now what did it matter to her that Adam was a man? All that mattered was that there were men like Herr Reisen, and that other men ought to know. It was all the better that Adam was a man.

She told them everything, all she knew; about the eight girls of whom Augustine had spoken, and that one was only twelve. She told them with the stimulus of the coffee in her brain, and the thought of Dorrie in her heart. But she did not tell them about Dorrie: that was the only thing she did not tell them.

And when she had finished telling them, they said they did not believe her. Not in so many words; but Alicia said she must have been mistaken, and Adam said she must have misunderstood; and the reasons they gave were that Rayke had gone up to see Professor Reisen and that a society whose name Alicia could not pronounce was to present him with a gold medal.

To be sure, Adam remembered, Rayke had referred vaguely—but it was because animals—you couldn't be sure—the results——

"And I'm sure if Dr. Rayke approved," said Alicia, "that it was for the girls' own good."

"And the good," added Adam, "of humanity."

And then——

Georgina looked from one to the other, and the

thing inside her that she had tried to hold together was somehow outside her, and she could not hold it. And constrained by the thing she told them about Dorrie. She had meant never to tell them. But now she told them.

And when she had told them, again—not in so many words—but again they said they did not believe her. They said what the French specialist had said. They did not shrug their shoulders or turn out the palms of their hands; they were very much distressed, and they were very, very kind; but they said, as he had said, that she must be mistaken, that it must have been some other way, that after all there was no positive proof. They said it because they were so good, but they said it. They were very good and terribly distressed and overflowing with sympathy. But they did not believe her.

Mrs. Vearing wept, and came and put her arms round Georgina, and said, what could she do? Georgina did not weep; she made a little movement to try and get rid of Mrs. Vearing's arms, and she did not answer.

And then the Vicar said something about Christian fortitude, and Georgina turned on the Vicar.

"Don't dare to talk to me of Christian fortitude! It's all very well for things—for ordinary things—for things that don't matter. But this . . . Dorrie . . ."

All of a sudden it struck Georgina that there was something extraordinarily funny about Christian fortitude, that it was all extraordinarily funny; the experiments, and Dorrie, and Rayke going up to London, and everything. And, being funny, it was a thing to laugh at. Georgina laughed.

She laughed and laughed; she shook and screamed

with laughter ; the peals of her laughter rang through the room and through the house ; she laughed till she cried. She laughed literally till she cried, for suddenly she was sobbing ; and in her sobbing she screamed as she had screamed in her laughter. Then the laughter came back ; and then the sobs ; and then again the laughter ; till at last she was still ; exhausted, motionless, rigid.

CHAPTER IX

THREE things were known that evening throughout the length and breadth of Stottleham. The first was that dear Mrs. Bonham had been suddenly seized with faintness and was lying ill at the Vicarage. The second was that Miss Bonham had influenza and was lying ill in London. The third was that Mrs. Bonham had sent her love to Ludovic Pottlebury.

There was no dispute as to the main facts of these three pieces of news, but there was considerable discussion as to details. Dissension was acute on the point of Mrs. Bonham's exact message to Mr. Pottlebury, some maintaining that the greeting sent was "kind love," others declaring that it was love without any qualification. The advocates of love pure and simple finally carried the day ; it was conceded that dear Mrs. Bonham's kindness could hardly be supposed to run into adjectives when it flowed beyond the precincts of her own set.

There was also some difference of opinion as to which of the spare rooms at the Vicarage Mrs. Bonham was in. There were those who asserted that she was in the best room at the front of the house : others

said no, she was in the smaller one at the back because it was quieter. Some had seen a nurse at the front window; others knew that there was no nurse, and that if by any chance one had arrived recently, it was certainly not the front window she would be looking out of.

As to Dorrie, discussion was confined to the question of the hotel in London in which she was ill. The Malden? Certainly not; it was Claridge's. But it could not be Claridge's because it was known as a fact that it was the Ritz. As to the influenza itself, there was no dispute; it was agreed that Dorrie had it; and, mild in character at the beginning of the evening, it was of the most malignant type by bedtime.

But Dorrie really had influenza. Though Mrs. Bonham, struggling with the interrogatory importunities of Patricia Pottlebury, had supposed herself to be telling a lie when she gave influenza as the cause of Dorrie's indisposition, it was truth nevertheless which Patricia, on Mrs. Bonham's authority, set floating through the waters of Stottleham. Dorrie had influenza, and it was the one thing, when Georgina heard of it, for which she felt she could be thankful. It was a respectable, mentionable disease, the sort of disease as to which, as the Vicar had said, you could exercise Christian fortitude.

Was it about Dorrie he had said it? Georgina remembered the Vicar saying something about Christian fortitude, but she did not remember clearly what had led up to his saying it, and after he had said it she did not remember anything at all.

For a week she lay in the Vicarage spare bedroom (Miss Truefitt and her faction were right; it was the

one at the back); for a week she lay there without remembering or knowing anything at all; and for another week she lay there getting better. She was tenderly nursed by Mrs. Vearing; she was unremittingly enquired after by all the Stottleham sets; even Miss Truefitt called repeatedly, though, not being in Mrs. Bonham's set, she did not leave a card.

And while Georgina lay ill at Stottleham tended by Mrs. Vearing, Dorrie lay ill in London tended by Hannah.

CHAPTER X

EVERY morning while Dorrie lay ill, Hannah brought in a bouquet of beautiful flowers. "From Mr. Fortescue," said Hannah.

Dorrie loved the bouquets: she had them divided into smaller bouquets and placed all about the room, so that she could see some of them whichever way she looked.

"But I wish he'd write," she said from time to time.

"You know, Miss Dorrie, the doctor said you wasn't to have letters."

"I never heard him."

"He told me, Miss Dorrie."

"I'm not so *very* ill."

"No, Miss Dorrie, but your temperature's high."

"If it goes down, I suppose . . ."

"When it goes down, Miss Dorrie, you can have all the letters you please. And Mr. Fortescue can come up one day and see you."

"I don't know . . . I almost think I don't want to see him till my lip's well."

"I shouldn't worry about my lip, Miss Dorrie."

They were right at Stottleham; Dorrie's influenza was severe; and Hannah was right when she told Dorrie that her temperature was high. It seemed to be high for a long time, and all the time it was high her head hurt dreadfully; but always, while the high temperature was there and the dreadful aching head, there too was Hannah, with a basin of cool water, and a cool wet handkerchief to lay upon the head. Then the temperature dropped, and the doctor told Hannah that now was the time to take care because of the weakness wrought by the influenza on the heart, and that Hannah must be watchful.

Hannah was watchful, and day after day Dorrie grew stronger; and as she grew stronger she talked more about Len.

"Can't I soon have letters?"

"I should say so, Miss Dorrie."

"I shall ask the doctor."

"Very well, Miss Dorrie."

The next morning Dorrie asked the doctor if she could have letters, and the doctor said: "Certainly."

"I'll tell Mr. Fortescue myself," said Hannah, "this afternoon."

"But he brings the flowers in the morning, and they've come."

"He's wrote and said he would like to come up and see me this afternoon, Miss Dorrie."

For a time Dorrie said nothing; then she called Hannah.

"Nurse!"

Hannah went to her.

"Nurse, when you see him—it might be, before my lip's better, a long time—I mean a long time

to wait to see him when I want to see him so badly."

"It might be a week or two, Miss Dorrie."

"I don't think I could hardly wait a week or two. So, Nurse——"

"Yes, Miss Dorrie dear."

"You might tell him—and see if he minds."

"Mind? As if he'd mind!"

"If he minds—I couldn't bear it if he was to mind, if he was to care ever such a little bit less."

"As if he'd mind!"

"Nurse."

"Yes, Miss Dorrie."

"If he was to leave off loving me, I'd rather die."

"I know you would, my lamb. But there! as if he'd mind!"

"He might. But then—he mightn't. But almost—yes, I'd like you to tell him."

Just before Hannah went to see Len, Dorrie said it again, that she would like Hannah to tell him. And Hannah said she would.

She said it smiling, and smiling she went out of the room; but dread was in her heart. For was Len a prince? what Hannah called a prince? She did not know, but she was going to know now, before she went back to Dorrie. She had written to him to come just for that very reason, that she had to know whether or not he was a prince. Hannah had written to Len to ask him to come, and he had come, but dread was in her heart. For he had not been before since Dorrie had been ill; he did not even know that she had been very ill. And he had sent no flowers. It was Hannah who had ordered the flowers to be sent.

CHAPTER XI

LEN was in the sitting-room waiting for Hannah and Hannah was sorry for him when she saw his face.

For half an hour they talked together, and most of the time Len's face was turned away, and part of the time Hannah was on her knees. And then Len went away.

Hannah, when he had gone, did not at once go back to Dorrie.

He was not a prince: she could not go back at once: before she went back she had to master her passionate disappointment, her bitter contempt for Len. She went up to her bedroom and stood there while the iron entered into and seared her soul. The few possessions she had brought with her helped in the searing, since they all spoke to her of Dorrie. There was Dorrie's face looking out from the photograph frame; there was the Bible with leaves torn by Dorrie; the pincushion with stains of ink spilled by Dorrie; and the blue glass bottle on the mantelpiece.

She stood and thought of Len. She had no mercy on him. She did not even allow herself to conceive that he might be right, that Lady Clementina might be right. Risk! Children! No right to run the risk! And Dorrie? Dorrie's tender heart? "If he was to leave off loving me, I'd rather die." Hannah knew it, knew Dorrie had spoken the truth; what at the moment Dorrie believed to be the truth; what in the time to come would prove to be truth indeed.

For Len was representative; as Hannah put it, "they're all alike." If Len failed, Len who had known Dorrie in the fulness of her health and beauty,

there was none who would not fail. A year ago if Len, for any reason, while that health and beauty was still untouched, had failed, Hannah would indeed have scouted him; her anger would have been hot, her scorn unmeasured; but there would have been no despair to flood scorn and anger with bitterness. She would have said: "There's many and many a one'll want her better worth having than him. And so young as she is, she'll forget him by and by." His stupidity, crass and contemptible, would have been his outstanding characteristic in Hannah's estimation.

But now! Now the onward course of Dorrie's life would be a path only of humiliation: there would be none to follow Len. And when she knew, understood, why Len, why they all . . . "She must never know," said Hannah.

The words were fixed in Hannah's mind: "She must never know": and side by side with them stood words of Dorrie's: "I'd rather die."

She stood there looking, looking, looking: her eyes were on the blue bottle on the mantelpiece: God alone knows what with her inner vision she looked at as she stood there before going back to Dorrie.

But her face was dreadful: haggard, agonized, dreadful.

Still with the dreadful face she went back to Dorrie's room, but she waited a moment outside before she opened the door. And in that moment she changed her face: when she entered the room it wore a radiant smile.

"Nurse, have you seen him?"

"Of course I see him."

"And—what did he say, Nurse?"

"What should he say, Miss Dorrie?"

"Did you tell him—about this?" Dorrie touched her lip.

"I told him, Miss Dorrie."

"And he said—what did he say?"

"Didn't I tell you what he'd say? As if he *could* say anything but what I said he'd say!"

"He didn't mind?"

"Not him."

"Oh!" Dorrie drew a long breath. "Oh, I'm so glad. He is a darling, isn't he?"

"He is, Miss Dorrie."

"And he'll come?"

"Soon as you're better."

"And he'll write?"

"At once, Miss Dorrie."

"Then to-morrow, in the morning, I'll have a letter?"

"To-morrow for sure, Miss Dorrie."

CHAPTER XII

THE doctor looked in at dusk.

"All right, but she's been a little upset, hasn't she? or excited?"

"A little excited, sir."

Hannah was anxious to know whether the excitement might have a serious effect; she asked the doctor all kinds of questions; she was particularly insistent as to the possibility of heart failure. Was there still a risk of it?

"I don't say there isn't, though I don't say there is. I . . ."

"But it wouldn't be out of the way if . . .?"

"Nothing is out of the way in these cases. I should watch her a little."

"I'll watch her all night, sir."

When the doctor had gone, Dorrie said: "Nurse, come and sit beside me."

Hannah sat beside her.

"Does your head ache at all, Miss Dorrie? I've got the little basin here and the handkerchief?"

"No, my head doesn't ache. I'm tired, but my head doesn't ache. I want you to sit there and tell me about my darling Len, all about him; everything he said, and what he looked like, and if he laughed."

"He laughed, Miss Dorrie, when I told him about your lip."

"Did he? Really? Then I know he didn't mind. How lovely of Len to laugh!"

Hannah made no answer.

"Nurse!"

"Yes, Miss Dorrie."

"If Len didn't love me it would break my heart."

"I know it would, my own."

"I'd rather die than not be married to Len."

"I know, my little lamb."

"Tell me everything he said."

Hannah began, and paused and went on again, and told Dorrie what Len had not said: it came quite easily after the first few sayings. She went on till Dorrie's breathing became quite regular, till it seemed as if Dorrie might fall asleep. Then she said: "The doctor left some medicine for you, Miss Dorrie. You was to have it the last thing."

"Oh, must I have it, Nurse? I'm tired of medicine."

"I'm afraid you—you must, Miss Dorrie." Hannah got up. "I'll go and fetch it."

"Isn't it here?"

"No, Miss Dorrie."

"You won't be long gone?"

"No, not long."

Hannah went out of the room and upstairs to her bedroom. She took the medicine glass with her and filled it and returned.

She stood by Dorrie's bedside. "Miss Dorrie!"

"Oh, dear," said Dorrie; and then, when she had emptied the glass: "Medicine bothers me."

"My lamb."

Hannah put her arms round Dorrie, held her to her breast, kissed her. "My little lamb," she said, "my own little one. My own little child!"

She kissed Dorrie's face, her cheeks, her forehead, the marred beauty of her mouth.

"Nurse," said Dorrie, "you do love me."

"My little one, my love . . ."

Hannah's voice broke, but Dorrie did not notice the break in it; her thoughts had fled from Hannah.

"Only not so much as Len," she said. Her eyes closed.

Dorrie slept quietly; her breathing was somewhat feeble and grew feebler. Hannah sat by the bed and looked at her. There was the nightlight, and the little table with the basin and handkerchief, and the stillness of the night, and Dorrie lying asleep and Hannah watching her. Hannah's face was white—whiter than Dorrie's. Once or twice she rose from her chair and bent over Dorrie. Towards the dawn she fell on her knees beside the bed and laid her head and her arms upon the bedclothes, and all the bed moved with her trembling. Only Dorrie did not move.

Hannah sat there till the dawn had reached the day. When it was light she rose, bent over Dorrie, touched

her, laid her cheek against Dorrie's face. Then her hand sought the bell and rang it, again and again.

People came at last, a half-dressed chambermaid, a porter rubbing his eyes. The doctor—they must 'phone at once for the doctor.

When she had sent for the doctor, Hannah went back into Dorrie's room and back to Dorrie's bed. She bent over the bed and took the form of Dorrie in her arms and pressed it to her bosom and held it there. She was holding Dorrie thus when the doctor came.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. BONHAM, arriving next day, in answer to Hannah's telegram, was met by Hannah. In the telegram Hannah had said: "Come at once," and Mrs. Bonham, terrified, had risen from her bed and come. Mrs. Vearing came with her.

Both Mrs. Vearing and Mrs. Bonham, since Mrs. Bonham had been well enough to be anxious, had been anxious about Dorrie, but their anxiety had not been nearly great enough to suggest the possibility of such a telegram as Hannah's.

Mrs. Bonham, arriving, said to Hannah: "Is—is she . . . ?"

And Hannah said: "She's gone."

Mrs. Vearing went out of the room, and Mrs. Bonham sat down and wept. She wept with all the pain and the grief and the dread of the last few weeks in her tears, and, because the flood of her suffering found a flow, her tears did her good. Then, when she had cried for a long time, she asked Hannah to tell her all about it, and Hannah told her.

She told her that Dorrie had seemed much better, was better, but was tired; she told her how she had sat by Dorrie and watched, and how at the dawn Dorrie had seemed very still; she told her how the doctor had warned her that Dorrie's heart might fail, and how, coming as soon as he could be fetched, he said that it had failed. She did not tell Mrs. Bonham the lies about Len that she had told to Dorrie, but she told her what Len had really said.

When Hannah had finished telling everything, Mrs. Bonham said: "It would have broken her heart."

Hannah said: "She didn't ever know as he had cast her off."

Mrs. Bonham sat for a while, still, and saying nothing; then she looked at Hannah and said:

"I don't know . . . it may be the mercy of God . . . it may be there was no other way."

"It may be," said Hannah.

Mrs. Bonham got up from her seat; as she stood she tottered. She looked at Hannah and said: "Oh, Hannah!" She came close to Hannah and put her head down on Hannah's shoulder.

Hannah put her arms round Mrs. Bonham.

When Mrs. Bonham had gone to bed Hannah sat thinking.

Besides the inventions about Len, there was another thing that she had not told Mrs. Bonham. She had thought that perhaps the doctor might find it out and tell Mrs. Bonham and all the world; but the doctor had not found out anything. Hannah knew, since it was evening and a whole day had passed, that it had not entered into the doctor's mind that there was anything to find out.

The thought in her mind as she sat alone after Mrs. Bonham had gone to bed was, dared she tell? The bottle still stood on the mantelpiece, nearly empty now instead of three parts full. She looked at it and wondered. Dared she tell? If she could have been hanged (she called it hung) it would have been a joy to Hannah. But the joy of hanging could not be reached except by things coming out. And things, she felt, must never come out.

If the doctor—if through the doctor things had been made known, Hannah's way would have been plain and, from Hannah's point of view, easy. But since the doctor had shed no light, now, for evermore, so it seemed to her, there must be darkness. Because darkness was best for Dorrie. For only one or two people knew what had happened to Dorrie, but not all the world. And Len knew, and Lady Clementina knew, that Len had cast Dorrie off. But nobody else, save only Hannah and Mrs. Bonham. And if . . . Did Hannah dare to confess, all the world would know—or might know—of Dorrie's humiliation. For at trials things came out. Hannah had a horror of judges and of lawyers: they were sure to find things out.

And if she just followed Dorrie? told nothing, but just followed her? Hannah's thought hugged the idea, then abandoned it. She must not follow Dorrie, because then too things might come out. For there would be the coroner—an inquest, and coroners also always found things out.

To both of these ways of escape there was but one alternative; if the way of death would mean too great a risk, there was only one way for her to take—she must give her life to looking after Mrs. Bonham.

Hannah, pondering long, decided that the risk was too great; there must be no smallest chance of anything coming out. So it must be life and taking care of Mrs. Bonham. Nothing else was possible. But the darkness of the night was as light to the darkness in the heart of Hannah.

It was in 1911 that Hannah made her choice.

Herr Reisen is no longer either in England or in Germany, no longer in any country belonging to the visible world.

Len is married. Lady Clementina's daughter-in-law has family and money and good looks and all that Lady Clementina and the relations wanted in Len's wife: but there is something she has not, something which the daughter-in-law that Lady Clementina did not want, had, and Lady Clementina misses that something.

Georgina sold the Beeches and left Stottleham. She is estranged from Rayke, but she sees Mrs. Vearring sometimes. In her new neighbourhood there are neighbours who like to be asked to tea by Mrs. Bonham, but the Mrs. Bonham they have tea with is not the Mrs. Bonham of Stottleham. It is a faint little satisfaction to Georgina that Dorrie died of an illness she can talk about.

Hannah lives with her and is faithful with unfailing faithfulness. She knows that Mrs. Bonham has a heavy burden to bear.

But Hannah bears a heavier burden still.

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